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IN A LITTLE CABIN A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG GIRL LOOKED FONDLY YET PITYINGLY IN TO A PAIR OF SIGHTLESS EYES, WHILE NEAR AT HAND STOOD THE ONE-EYED SPORT TO WHOM DEVOTION ALL OWED SO MUCH.

OR, The Girl Protegee of Red Flash.

A Story of the Old Fatality Mine.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "FELIX FOX," "TEXAS TRUMP,"
"BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "CITY
SLEUTHS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
ONE OF SIX.

RED FLASH CITY had not had a genuine sensation since its founding deep in the Colorado mountains. This was strange, for many of its citizens were not of the gentlest nature, and very few belonged to the fairer sex.

About one hundred houses formed the stirring camp which communicated with the outside

world through Dolores, a mining city larger than Red Flash, and but ten miles from an arm of the Union Pacific.

A stage made weekly trips between Red Flash and Dolores, starting from the former place and coming back to it, which was the home of the owner of the line.

The distance was twenty-five miles, and twenty-five miles of as rough a country as any one wished to see.

Sometimes the stage would go down to Dolores with a full complement of passengers and return with none at all, and sometimes this order of things would be reversed.

Whenever Red Flash had a consignment of gold for the outer world, the stage would contain six good-looking, dark-faced fellows in big hats, armed to the teeth and on the alert.

These men were known as the Gold Guard, and their aspect told that it would not be safe for road-agents to attempt to stop the stage that carried them.

Up to the opening of our story the stage had never been attacked, but the men of Red Flash did not abate their vigilance on this account; the Guard always accompanied the precious cargo to Dolores and left it not until they saw it in safe hands.

It was an early morning in the late summer when Red Flash City's first real sensation came, and in the following startling manner.

Daylight was just breaking over the camp when the piercing cry of a young girl thrilled the air, and the first man to rush from a cabin saw her throw herself upon the body of a man, who lay face downward on the ground in the dust of the main street.

In a little while the girl, who was a beautiful creature of seventeen, was surrounded by a dozen startled men, and a pair of big kindly hands lifted her gently from the man in the road.

"He is dead! don't you see?" exclaimed the girl, pointing to the body. "He has been killed by some assassin. Look! I have not removed the knife that did the work!"

It was then discovered that the girl had made a terrible discovery, for the man on the ground carried a large dagger in his back.

Another discovery was made when the dagger was examined. The handle was wrapped with rice paper which, when unrolled, was found to bear a mystifying sentence of three words:

"One of six."

The girl appeared thunderstruck; she stood silent and trembling in the midst of the group of men, and made no resistance when she was led back into the cabin from which she had come.

The murdered man was the girl's guardian, a person called Babette, though nobody believed that was his proper name. He had been one of the founders of the "city," and was the nabob of the place in point of wealth and position.

He was the fifth owner of a mine which had obtained the name of Old Fatality Mine, for all its owners had been killed in some mysterious manner by an assassin.

Babette and the girl Finette were much attached to one another. He did not pretend to be her father, and when anybody spoke of her in his presence, he always said that she was the daughter of a friend who was dead.

Needless to say, the mysterious killing threw Red Flash into a high state of excitement.

No strangers had been seen about the camp, and whenever men came together, a score of theories were sure to clash.

The dagger was examined and re-examined. It had an almost straight blade of seven inches, and an iron hilt with a polished hand-guard. There was nothing about it to suggest a solution of the puzzle, only all agreed that the weapon belonged to nobody in the camp.

Babette was not known to have any enemies; but then the fatal mine had lately passed into his hands, and certain citizens shook their heads when they said that nobody would be allowed to hold Old Fatality in peace.

It was high noon on the same day when the stage rolled in from Dolores in a cloud of dust that almost hid driver, steeds and vehicle.

The driver was a youth of eighteen; handsome with his brilliant black eyes and well-cut features. He was not very large for his age, but he was by no means dwarfish. He was called Chickadee wherever he was known, and his control over the powerful horses, that made the stage spin over the mountain trail, was quite wonderful.

All people trusted him, and more than once Dolores had tried to get him on the line that ran from there to the railroad.

The stage on this occasion had two passengers,

and when Chickadee drew up in front of the two-story, weather-boarded building that went by the name of hotel, he leaped from his seat and opened the door to assist his passengers out.

The first person to emerge was a man about forty-five. He was somewhat of a dandy in appearance, as he was scrupulously attired, and wore his mustache waxed like a Frenchman. His hands were incased in a pair of skin-fitting brown gloves which he had worn all the way from Dolores, and the moment he stepped nimbly from the stage, several spectators marked him down for a sharp of the first water.

The next passenger was the representative of a race of people who were not very welcome in Red Flash City.

He was a Chinaman, apparently fifty years old, and was attired in half-civilized garments which gave him a rather odd appearance.

The two passengers did not seem to be acquainted, and the dandyish man evidently held the Celestial in contempt.

John did not notice the scowl which greeted his appearance, but quietly proceeded to fish out his luggage from under the seat—a small black box almost square, with brass ornaments at the top corners.

Of course no Chinaman would be permitted to become a guest at the Beelzebub Hotel; therefore he would have to seek accommodations among the few Celestials who inhabited the lower part of the town.

The American was escorted into the Beelzebub by its proprietor, while the Chinaman was left to take care of himself.

"You've come back in time for the funeral," announced a gaunt-looking man, tapping the boy driver on the arm.

"What funeral?"

"Why, don't you know?—of course you don't. How should you?" and the man smiled as he said:

"Babette is dead!"

The boy started and gave the speaker a look of unbelief.

"Who killed him?" he asked.

The thin man laughed as if he could not help it.

"How do you know he was killed?"

"The fatal mine!" exclaimed the boy. "Babette is the fifth owner, you know?"

The man nodded.

"Tell me all about it, Gaunt, while I put the horses away. Tell me everything."

For the next ten minutes Chickadee was doing two things at the same time, stabling the horses and listening to all Gaunt George knew about the tragedy.

He did not interrupt the narrator once, but let him relate the story in his quaint way while he leaned against the stable door with folded arms.

"It's almost killed Finette, the poor thing," said the talker. "She was wrapped up in Babette and he in her. If we had some of them sharps who hunt out mysteries in the big cities, maybe we'd get ter know more about our puzzle. It's sure death for any one ter own Old Fatality. Nobody'll want ter claim it now."

Chickadee's eyes gave a sudden flash at Gaunt George's remark.

"What do they talk of doing with the mine?" he asked.

"They talk o' lettin' it be," answered the tough. "I've heered Rico Rob say he wouldn't touch it for all creation, and that man war raised on sand, yer know, Chickadee?"

"I know him," replied the boy driver. "But, the mine is not going to remain without an owner."

"Who'll take it?"

"I will!"

Gaunt George's hand rose in protest.

"We won't let you," he cried. "We don't want you ter be ther sixth an' last owner o' Old Fatality."

"You can consider me such from this moment. I will take possession of the mine before night, but I continue to drive between Red Flash and Dolores all the same. You say that Babette's body is in his cabin?"

"Yes, we took it thar, of course."

"And Finette, too?"

"An' Finette's thar, in course."

A few moments later Chickadee entered a large weather-boarded cabin near the middle of the camp, and down into the face of a young girl whose eyes showed traces of long weeping.

In one corner of the room lay the sheeted figure of Babette.

Chickadee did not go to it, but drew the girl into a small adjoining apartment and said:

"This shall be my work!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Finette.

"I am going to solve the mystery of this murder! In the first place, I am going to proclaim myself owner of Old Fatality, and, next, I intend to find the person who dealt the blow last night!"

The girl drew back with a tremor and looked him in the face.

"You know the document Babette found in the mine when he took possession of it?" she cried.

"Yes, I do!"

"He is the fifth owner killed. The paper said that when the sixth owner had fallen, the mine would revert to its original owners."

"They are the assassins!" exclaimed the boy driver. "I hear that none of the sports or miners want to claim the mine, therefore I shall. Before night I will proclaim myself proprietor from the porch of the Beelzebub Hotel!" And his eyes glowed as he made the announcement.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN IN KIDS.

IN the mean time one of the passengers of Chickadee's stage had been formally installed as a guest of the Beelzebub Hotel.

He was the passenger in kids and registered himself as Captain Ringbolt.

He had said, furthermore, that he had come almost direct from Denver where he was one of the officers of the Great Denver Gold Union, an organization which was to assist in bringing out the metallic resources of the mountains.

Captain Ringbolt had "a slick tongue and good address, and Yuba Monte, the proprietor of the Beelzebub, did not doubt that he was entertaining a very great man."

"Monte affected to have heard something about the Gold Union when, to be plain, he had never heard of its existence, and every now and then Ringbolt would smile at Yuba's nods of approval."

The Beelzebub was not a very roomy hostelry, but the best apartment in it was at once set apart for the grandee's use, and he was escorted to it by the proprietor himself.

"Have you a man here named Rico Rob?" asked Ringbolt.

"I should say we have!" exclaimed Yuba. "Everybody's heard o' Rico Bob. Friend o' yours?"

"No, I have merely heard of him, and my business here will naturally bring us together. Can you send him up?"

"Certainly. Do you want him now?"

"If you can find him."

Eager to obey, the landlord made quick time down the rough stairs, and in less than five minutes time had found Rico Bob.

Captain Ringbolt's only baggage was a small leathern valise which he had taken to his room with him, and which had not been out of his sight for a moment.

When the landlord had left he opened the valise and thrust his hand into its depths as if to satisfy himself that a certain article was safe, for a satisfactory smile overspread his face and he closed the receptacle with a snap.

"It'll take me a little while to get down to business, but when I do, Red Flash will open her eyes!" he ejaculated, glancing out of the window from which he could see a small portion of the camp and the mountains beyond. "It's about time for my agent to get his work in again. He will report when he comes. Ah! the landlord has found Rob, already!"

At that moment there were footsteps on the stairs. Ringbolt fixed two shining eyes on the door, which the steps were approaching, and when the door opened and revealed a man whose burly figure almost filled it, he could not keep back an exclamation of pleasure.

"The 'best man' of Red Flash stood before Ringbolt, his dark-brown pantaloons buried in the tops of his boots, and in a new, open jacket, whose front wore a lot of new braid with a plentiful sprinkling of silver thread, Rico Rob was as handsome as he was big.

His rounded face had a large black mustache, the ends of which, unlike Ringbolt's, had never known wax; his eyes were a dark hazel and full of latent spirit, while his hands had fingers that looked positively dangerous.

Ringbolt leaned back in his chair with his valise very close to it, and scrutinized his visitor's face.

Rico Rob closing the door took a step toward the guest and held out his hand.

"By George! you're still on duty, I see!" ejaculated Ringbolt. "Did you see me come in?"

"Yes."

"And you knew me?"

"Not at first. I did not look for you in a

bandbox lay-out!" And Rico Rob glanced at the captain's make-up.

A smile flitted across Ringbolt's face.

"What kind of a game did you give Monte and the boys?"

"The Great Gold Union scheme!" was the reply.

"I told him we were going to develop the resources of Colorado. Ha, ha! so we are when we get to work! You saw my companion?"

"The Celestial? Yes. Is he the same old yellow-skin?"

"Ah Sin, with his eye-teeth cut!" laughed Captain Ringbolt.

"I thought I knew him by the old leer he used to carry. Well, how goes it?"

The guest leaned back again and thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his elegant vest.

"I'm getting kind of tired of the game. It seems to drag," he answered.

"It was lively enough here last night."

"In what way?"

"The fifth man died!"

Ringbolt almost left his chair; his thumbs jumped from his vest, and he darted toward Rico Rob with a cry.

"Babette?" he cried.

"Babette!" was the response.

"When was he found?"

"This morning, in front of his own house."

"Killed in the usual way?"

"Yes, only this time the dagger went in at the back. The bit of rice paper was wound around the handle with the usual inscription, 'One of six,' on it."

Captain Ringbolt was silent for a moment.

"What will be done now?" he asked.

Rico Rob shook his head.

"Don't you know who will step into Babette's shoes?" queried the hotel's guest.

"No, nor does anybody else."

"Ain't there one man in Red Flash City brave enough to try it?"

"That remains to be seen, though I think they are willing to let Babette be the last man. Some of the boys have been bantering me to claim the mine, but I've told 'em that my hands were too full of other work; besides," here Rico Rob paused and leaned toward the intensely interested man in the chair, "besides, captain, it wouldn't do for me to assume the pressure."

"Of course it wouldn't," assented Ringbolt. "We don't want any nonsense of this kind out of you, Rob. Some fool will be dazzled by the prospects of Old Fatality Mine, and will be willing to risk it. What does Red Flash think about Babette's taking off?"

"It is the camp's first real puzzle. You know the other four men were made away with before Red Flash had a *bona fide* existence. Babette was the fifth owner of the Fatality, though the first one in the history of this camp. Yes, sir, Red Flash has a deep mystery—entirely too deep for any head in it," and Rico Rob laughed derisively.

"Then I have arrived at an important moment," observed the other.

"At a very important one," was the answer.

"What will become of the girl—Finette, you call her, eh?"

"Oh, the camp will probably adopt her, unless some fellow takes a liking to her."

"Is she pretty?"

"As a mountain flower! She has come out wonderfully within the last year."

"I'd like to see her," exclaimed Ringbolt, twirling his mustache as if he stood before a toilet mirror. "I have an eye for beauty, you know," and he smiled complacently.

"But you want to confine yourself strictly to business here."

"Certainly I shall. Remember, I am the general locating agent of the Great Denver Gold Union."

"By Jericho! that sounds well!" ejaculated Rico.

"There's just enough of it to catch the seraphs of Red Flash," and Ringbolt caught up the valise and opened it on his lap.

Thrusting one hand into it, he drew out a buckskin packet about ten inches in length.

"I did not forget you, you see," he observed, extending the object, which the big sport took and hid in an inner pocket of his laced jacket.

"I am glad to get to the end at last," he remarked, as he shut the valise. "I shall call a meeting of the principal citizens of Red Flash at this hotel whenever you think it advisable, and then I'll proceed to divulge the schemes of the Great Denver Gold Union in a way that'll make them all Vanderbilts in their minds' eye."

A noise of voices in the street below arrested further speech. Captain Ringbolt, glancing

from the window, noticed signs of a commotion below. A number of men were moving toward the hotel porch in evident excitement.

"Somebody is talking from the porch!" exclaimed the captain.

In an instant the hand of the big sport threw up the sash, and the two men listened, and this is what they heard:

"Men of Red Flash, I have a word with you all. Babette has been killed because he was proprietor of Old Fatality Mine. The legend is that six owners shall die, and then the mine will pass into the hands of those to whom it rightfully belongs. The proprietorship of the mine ended with Babette's death. Is there a man among you who wants to run it? If there is, let him speak out, here and now!"

"Who is that person?" asked Ringbolt.

"Chickadee, the young whip who brought you up from Dolores," was the answer.

"That boy?" sneered the captain. "Why, he isn't a handful! But, surely, he doesn't intend to—"

"There he goes again. Listen!" interrupted Rico.

"Then, as you all hold your peace, I now proclaim myself owner and proprietor of Old Fatality Mine, to keep, work and defend it to the best of my ability!"

A deafening shout succeeded these words, and the two at the window saw a dozen sombreros rise above the roof of the porch.

"The young scamp doesn't mean that!"

"Every word of it!" was the reply. "He is grit to the backbone!"

CHAPTER III.

SINGLE SIGHT.

RED FLASH had a new mine proprietor, Chickadee, the bright-eyed young stage driver.

The citizens of the mountain camp would have advised him against taking possession of the fatal property; but he would not have receded if they had volunteered any advice of the kind.

The day was on the decline when a placard was placed over the entrance to the dangerous mine, and Chickadee had taken formal possession.

The mystery of Babette's death still was the talk of the camp; but all agreed that he was a victim of vengeance.

At nightfall the body was buried where a few mounds marked the last resting-place of some of the late residents of Red Flash.

The girl was thus left alone; but she was by no means friendless. More than a score of big brown-shirted fellows, with long hair and rough garments came down to the cabin to assure her of their protection.

Finette thanked them all, and dismissed them with a heart full of gratitude.

Among them was one who lingered—a man about thirty-five, rather handsome, though he had but one eye, the right—and that was as keen as an eagle's.

He was called Single Sight, though his true name was Saul Singley.

This man was somewhat dandyish in his dress, inasmuch as he affected a good deal of silver braid. He never wore his pants in his boots, but kept them about his heels, and his gaudy jacket was set off by two rows of shiny buttons, each of which bore his initials, "S. S."

Single Sight had never been very intimate with Babette. There seemed to be a coldness between the two men; but now he lingered in Finette's presence with his one eye fixed upon her.

"The boy has taken up the mine, I hear?" observed the man whose voice was really melodious.

"Yes, so he announced."

"Does he want to be the sixth person?"

"He is not anxious for that distinction—"

"Then, let him stick to his whip!" interrupted Single Sight. "As sure as he lives, he is already marked!"

"You cannot make him recede," assured Finette, confidently.

"I heard him at the hotel. He shows more grit than judgment. Thar ain't a man in Red Flash brave enough to take Babette's place. What is the mine, anyhow? During the past year it didn't yield much."

"Not a great deal."

"It is no honor to own it," Single Sight went on. "Chickadee had better keep on the road."

"He intends to."

"And give the killer a chance to present him with the iron-handled dagger somewhar 'twixt Red Flash and Dolores?"

Finette did not reply.

"Look hyer!" suddenly exclaimed the man;

"I'm interested in Chickadee, though he doesn't know it."

"In what way?" she asked.

"Never mind!" he proceeded. "I don't want him to embark on a scheme like this. He proposes to solve the mystery of Babette's death, eh?"

"He has said so."

"He must leave that to older people. I say so. You must talk him out of it."

"I cannot; I feel sure he won't listen to me."

"Have you tried him?"

"No, but I know I would fail."

Single Sight looked disappointed.

"Where is he now?"

"At home, I suppose."

"By Jupiter! I'm going to try it!" he decided.

"It is inviting death. He'll have a league to fight, and one of the most desperate and determined leagues ever organized in the West."

"Then, you know—"

"Not very much, Finette, my child; but enough to be sure that Chickadee must keep out of this business!" was the interruption; and, ere she could say more, Single Sight had vanished.

Night had fallen over Red Flash and Babette was sleeping under the newly disturbed sod of the mountain-side cemetery. The camp was comparatively still, but there were several groups of men on the porch of the Beelzebub, and Captain Ringbolt was talking with half a dozen in the bar-room.

While he was not unfolding the gigantic schemes of the Great Denver Gold Union, he was throwing out some hints of its immensity, and had suggested that a meeting had best be held when the camp had settled down over Babette's assassination.

Rico was not to be seen, and Single Sight merely glanced at the animated scene on the Beelzebub's porch as he passed on his way to Chickadee's quarters.

"I don't like 'im. Too much style for Red Flash, an' he dropped in at a singular time, too. Kids, an' wax on his mustache. I say ag'in, I don't like 'im. Why didn't he stay in his bandbox?" muttered Single Sight, as he hurried along, and a few minutes later he reached a small house from whose single window gleamed the light of a lamp.

Without knocking, he walked boldly in, to discover that Chickadee had a visitor, for a full-grown man turned upon him, and Single Sight stood face to face with Rico Rob.

The giant of Red Flash colored when he saw who had come in, and a quick look passed between him and the boy.

Chickadee spoke pleasantly to Single Sight, for no man was better known in Red Flash than the One-Eyed Sport. He never sought a quarrel, but for all that, he was cool and fearless, and the single orb could flash the fires of two when occasion required.

"You've just dropped in, in time," remarked Rico; "you can add your voice to mine. We don't want Chickadee to step into Babette's shoes."

A smile passed over Chickadee's face, that left a fearless expression there as it passed.

"We don't want him to be the sixth person," declared Single Sight. "Let some man take the mine, if he wants to run the risk. We think too much o' Chickadee hyer; an' then, who'd drive the stage?"

The boy broke into a merry laugh.

"I can't go back, gentlemen," he declared. "The die is cast! I am owner and proprietor of Old Fatality, and your advice and arguments will be useless."

"Then, you must take the consequences!" cried Rob. "I have done all I can. I have placed this matter before you in every light. If you think the hand that defends the mine will spare you on account of your youth, you will find your mistake to your everlasting sorrow."

"Thank you."

Rico was seen to bite his lip. "You can't turn him," he exclaimed, looking at Single Sight. "He wants notoriety; he intends to become famous at the expense—"

"Not so!" and in a moment Chickadee was on his feet and facing the sport. "I want justice, and Red Flash wants vengeance!" he cried. "The blood of Babette and that of the few men who preceded him calls for justice."

"Well, a boy can't obtain it," was the quick retort. "What I have done is for your own good. Red Flash doesn't want to see you follow Babette, who paid for the ownership of the fatal mine with his life. Beware! You needn't waste your breath on him, Single Sight. He wants to cash his chips on death's counter. Let him do it!" and Rico Rob, as if in disgust, left the room.

"Rico is on the flare to-night," remarked Single Sight, as the door closed.

"He has his blood up," and Chickadee walked to the window as if to follow the sport with a look.

Single Sight watched the boy in silence, and with a good deal of interest.

"If I can't persuade him," ran his thoughts, "I've got to do another thing—watch him like a hawk, become his body-guard, and stand between him and the silent slayer."

Chickadee turned from the window.

"Don't let me have to repulse your arguments, too, Single Sight," he cried, stepping forward. "Leave everything unsaid. Than you I have no better friend in Red Flash, but I am determined to fight the league who has made the ownership of Old Fatality fatal to five men. I believe I found a slight clew to-night."

"In the camp?" demanded Single Sight.

"Right here in Red Flash!" Then the boy lowered his voice as his hand closed on one of the sport's arms.

"There is a man lying on the ground at the door. He is playing spy for somebody."

In an instant the One-Eyed Sport's hand moved to his belt, but Chickadee checked it there.

"Let him be!" continued the boy. "He is only serving his master, and I don't want him to know that I suspect anything."

"Let me see him!" was Single Sight's demand, and he went to the window.

"Thar's nobody thar now," he answered, coming back to the boy.

Chickadee went to the window himself.

"It is true. The spy is gone. Never mind; I have marked him. If I am a boy, the Mine League will discover that it has no boy's fight on its hands!"

Chickadee seemed to increase in stature in the light of the cabin lamp.

"Go in!" cried Single Sight. "Draw on me for whatever you need—muscle, advice or trigger."

"I don't think I'll need you," laughed the boy, "but if I do, I'll remember."

A figure glided without noise from the shadow of the cabin; the spy had heard the compact!

CHAPTER IV.

FINETTE SURPRISES RINGBOLT.

"WELL, what does he say?"

"He doesn't yield an inch."

"Bound to go ahead, eh?"

"Yes; he's in to stay until the end comes."

Ringbolt and the giant of Red Flash were the speakers.

The captain leaned back in his chair and looked his confederate in the face.

"I thought I could talk him out of it," the big sport resumed. "I left him in Single Sight's care when I came away, but I guess he'll fare the same as I did."

"Who is this Single Sight?"

"A one-eyed sport, who is one of the permanent fixtures of Red Flash."

"A one-eyed man? What is he like?"

"Not very unlike the common run o' men," answered Rico Rob, with a smile. "You start as if you don't want to run across a one-eyed man."

"I do not. But this fellow?—go on!"

Rico answered with a minute description of Saul Singley, at which Ringbolt looked relieved.

"Thank fortune your one-eyed sport isn't the man I don't want to meet," he said. "I'll take a look at this Single Sight the first opportunity. Now, about how many days shall we let elapse?"

"I leave it to you."

"And I am anxious to get down to business, although I'm fixed to stay here any length of time. You see I didn't expect to reach Red Flash on the heels of this excitement," and Captain Ringbolt smiled. "But, I can work my Gold Union racket while I wait. Who'd have thought that a boy would step into Babette's shoes?" When does the stage go back to Dolores?"

"Not for three days unless on special service."

"Can't there be a special service? If you don't want to go, another passenger can be furnished," suggested Ringbolt.

"Would you like to have it go back early as to-morrow?"

"If you could arrange it so."

Ten minutes later Captain Ringbolt occupied a seat on the porch of the Beelzebub Hotel.

He no longer had a group of men about him; he was all alone, and one of the best cigars to be obtained in Red Flash was sending white

smoke-wreaths above his head, and while he puffed away, his heels against one of the square porch pillars, he looked like a person decidedly at peace with the world.

"I'd like to see the girl—Babette's legacy to Red Flash!" his thoughts ran, "but it is rather late for a call. To-morrow will do."

At that moment some one stepped upon the porch, and the captain stared in amazement. It was Finette!

The girl walked straight into the hotel, and in a moment the captain heard her voice as she spoke of Yuba Monte.

Captain Ringbolt was all ears in a moment.

"I have just finished looking through Babette's chest," remarked the girl. "It is full of strange things, and here is a packet marked for you."

"For me, Finette?" exclaimed the landlord, and Ringbolt, who was looking, saw him take a small package from the girl's hand.

Finette stood in the bright light of the two lamps that lit up the room, and her graceful figure and handsome face were plainly observed by the man on the porch.

Captain Ringbolt could not suppress a mental ejaculation.

Almost unconsciously he left his chair and glided toward the door.

He saw no one but Finette; Yuba Monte and the packet from the dead were already forgotten.

"Mebbe I'd better not open this here," smiled the landlord, glancing at the package. "I don't think I will. Ah! come in, captain!"

Yuba Monte had glanced toward the door where, as a matter of course, he saw the attractive figure of his guest.

The captain did not wait for another invitation, but came forward, and the next moment doffed his hat cavalierly to Finette.

The girl had not seen him since his arrival in Red Flash, but at the first look she recoiled with a start, and her cheeks lost color.

"I did not expect to encounter an angel in Red Flash!" exclaimed Ringbolt, with his eyes fastened on the girl.

"She's the boss one o' Colorado!" laughed Yuba Monte. "You might rake this globe with the closest rake in existence, an' not find her match."

"I believe it!" cried Ringbolt, as he took a step toward Finette whose amazement seemed to increase with her inspection. "They tell me that you were Babette's ward?"

"I am his ward still!" returned the girl.

"I am sorry he had to lose his life, but you will never lack for friends. Please number me among them."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Ringbolt—Captain Redfield Ringbolt, of Denver," and as he uttered the name with a good deal of pomposity, he drew his figure proudly up in a manner that made Finette smile.

"Very well; if you want to be my friend I cannot prevent you," asserted the girl. "I did not come hither on a hunt for friends. You can look at your packet whenever it suits you, Monte. I shall now return home."

Ringbolt stepped back to let Finette pass out, but in doing so he reached the door.

The beauty of Red Flash passed out, and as she stepped upon the porch he touched her arm.

"Will you permit me to accompany you to your cabin?" he asked politely.

Finette turned upon him with a half-indignant flash in her eyes, but all at once it disappeared, and a roguish look took its place.

"If you wish," she replied, moving off at the same time, and then she added with a laugh: "Oh! I believe I found something in his chest which concerns you."

The man's answer was a stare, but his quick wit came to his rescue, and expressing a desire to see that "something," he found himself walking away at Finette's side.

The walk to the girl's cabin home did not occupy much time, and Captain Ringbolt thought he had scored the first point in a new game when he found himself beneath the roof.

Finette went direct to a rather large chest that stood against the wall, and unlocked it with a key which she took from her pocket.

The Denver man watched her with the eye of a hawk. She had something to show him; but, what was it?

During the next few seconds the captain rapidly reviewed his life; he tried to fix the identity of the man called Babette, but the longer he tried, the deeper grew the enigma.

Finette turned from the chest, from the depths of which she had drawn a little package not larger than her well-shaped hand.

Captain Ringbolt's eyes became fastened on it at once.

"This is it, though it may not concern you, after all," the girl exclaimed, pausing at the table. "When you told me your name was Redfield Ringbolt, I thought of this."

The man from Denver was already leaning forward, and Finette's nimble fingers were removing a cord from the packet.

"In Satan's name, what is it?" mentally ejaculated the now excited man, while the girl worked at the cord.

The work was quickly finished, and when she had removed some heavy brown paper, something dropped upon the table.

"It is a miniature, you see!" the girl cried, looking into the almost colorless face of Ringbolt. "I can't say that it much resembles you, but a sharp instrument has written something across the top—see!"

The Denverite made no reply, for at that moment Finette held the daguerreotype in such a position that he read this inscription:

"REDFIELD—MY WORST ENEMY!"

The girl could not fail to notice the consternation caused by the old likeness, which represented a man in full mining costume, as if he had stepped from the shaft into the rooms of a mountain artist.

Ringbolt reached out his hand for the picture, but Finette drew it back.

"It belongs to me since Babette left me everything not addressed to any one," she exclaimed. "I don't see much resemblance between you and the picture, but I must keep it."

The man looked disappointed.

"Where did Babette get that picture?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"What good will it ever do you, Finette?"

"None, perhaps."

"Then, let me relieve you of it. It is the likeness of a man I have been looking for for some time. You do not know that Babette scratched the legend on the tin?"

"I do not."

"Who has seen the picture since Babette's death?"

"No person but myself."

"I'll give you twenty dollars for it."

The girl drew back.

"I am not at want's door!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "This picture remains where it is. Five thousand dollars wouldn't buy it!"

"All right!" cried Ringbolt; "the person who calls me 'Redfield' lies!—lies!—lies!"

CHAPTER V.

CHICKADEE ON DECK.

CAPTAIN RINGBOLT'S face was very red; his eyes seemed to blaze with passion, he glared tigerishly at the daguerrotype in Finette's hand, and for a moment he seemed about to snatch it from her grasp.

"I tell you I am not that person," he went on, pointing at the picture. "Where is the person who calls me 'Redfield'?"

Finette shook her head.

"I don't think anybody has accused you," she replied. "I am not going to make the charge. This picture does not concern me."

"Yet you won't part with it?"

"I will not."

"You have nothing else to show me?"

"Nothing else," was the echo.

Ringbolt got up and walked backward to the door. His eyes were still fastened on the picture.

"We may meet again," he said, at the door.

"You will remember that that is the likeness of a man whom I have been hunting some time. I cannot account for it being found in Babette's chest. This is a little mystery which may never be solved. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" returned Finette.

"It looks like him, for all he said," she muttered. "I am not certain that Babette scratched the name 'Redfield' across the plate; and he told me at the hotel that his name was 'Redfield Ringbolt.'"

Finette's home grew silent as she studied the portrait, and was so absorbed in it that the opening of the door did not disturb her.

Somebody came in, somebody whom she did not see, for her back was turned toward the entrance.

Suddenly a hand swooped down over her face like an eagle's beak. It seized the picture like the talons of the bird of prey, and Finette sprang away with a wild cry, as it was snatched from her hands!

"That is my property!" she exclaimed, wheel-

ing upon the thief. "I did not think you would come back—"

The girl stopped abruptly, for the person whom she confronted was not Captain Ringbolt, but a yellow-skinned Celestial—a perfect stranger to her.

He was the incarnation of a yellow devil while he stood between her and the door, confronted by the insulted girl.

"Master and man, is it?" cried Finette, going toward the heathen. "Hand back the picture, you yellow-skin scoundrel."

But the Celestial's eyes devilishly dared Finette to attempt a seizure.

"Me no givee back picture," he grinned. "Girl no takee, either."

"Where did you come from?" she asked. "Who are you?"

"Me allee Chinee," was the retort.

"But you don't belong here. You came to Red Flash with Captain Ringbolt."

The heathen shook his head with emphasis.

"Captain Ringbolt me not know," the Chinaman declared.

"The picture you have just concealed in your bosom gives the lie to your words."

"Does 'Mellican girl say Ah Sin lie?"

"Yes, if you say you don't know Captain Ringbolt!" was the brave response. "The master has just left; the man—the tool—has come! A sight of the portrait threw the captain into a rage. If you keep it, Red Flash will soon become too hot for you and the man you serve."

Ah Sin's yellow face was pushed forward like the face of a puma on the eve of a spring, when Finette, quickly stepping backward, threw her hand up to a small shelf fixed to the wall, and a small dagger was in her grasp, with an ebony handle, about which Finette's fingers wound firmly.

"Girl show fightee!" laughed the Chinaman, showing his teeth, but at the same time shrinking nearer the door.

"Go!" commanded Finette, sternly. "You pollute the house! Take the picture to 'Red-field.' Begone!"

The Celestial showed his teeth again and put his hand on the latch.

"Girl no get to cut Ah Sin!" and with a laugh on his ugly lips he was gone.

The abruptness of his departure startled Finette; and she did not see him join a man who was waiting for him half-way between the cabin and the Beelzebub Hotel, and where the shadows of Red Flash were deepest.

"It took you a long time," growled the man, out of humor. "You did not have to choke the mountain angel, eh?"

"No. Girl want to fight, though," was the reply, and Ah Sin took something from beneath his coat.

"Ah! you did not fail! Thank fortune! She resisted, eh?"

The Celestial nodded.

"Did she threaten?"

"She said she'd make Red Flashee too hotee for us."

"She did, eh?" and Ringbolt glanced toward Finette's cabin.

"The girl will make it too hot for you if she takes a notion."

Ah Sin seemed to draw back; he did not relish the remark.

"You've already performed an invaluable service and can afford to withdraw," continued the Denver sport. "I can swear my way out of all connection with you, Ah Sin; but they don't like Chinamen here, and one word from the girl would put all Red Flash on you. Don't you see?"

The Celestial did not speak.

"So you've got to go!" Ringbolt decided.

"Where me go?"

"Anywhere, so you are within call if we want you. You must run off to-night—right away. Bury your brass-tipped box, or take it along, just as you like."

"Will cap'n stay here?"

"Yes; I must stay. Everything is at stake."

"Girl may talk about you?"

"Let her!" cried Ringbolt, venomously; "I have Rico with me, and he is a mountain here. The boy who drove us up from Dolores has taken possession of Old Fatality Mine."

"Yes; boy much fooler!" grinned Ah Sin.

"Right you are! But we must part. If all goes well, and by heavens! it shall not go otherwise, you will be the richest Chinaman in America. Now, make yourself scarce. You've rendered me an invaluable service to-night. I am not the man who forgets. The sixth owner of the mine is a boy—not a handful! The game won't last long. The agent has been equipped. Now go, Ah Sin. Good-by."

The Chinaman was still reluctant to withdraw, but Captain Ringbolt's actions repulsed him.

All at once the man from Denver turned and walked away, and a moment later Ah Sin bounded off and was lost among the cabins.

Ringbolt went back to the Beelzebub whose porch was now quite deserted. The reception room was in almost the same condition, but as he entered the latter, Yuba Monte came forward with a twinkle in his eye.

"You made the girl a good visit!" ejaculated the host gleefully. "Isn't she a daisy, captain? What a sensation a man could make with her in the right place! We've all wondered a thousand times where Babette picked her up. She's ther luck o' Red Flash an'— Hello!"

Captain Ringbolt knew that somebody had entered the hotel, and when he turned toward the door he saw the handsome figure of Chickadee, the whip prince of the stage line.

His eyes were already fixed on the captain.

"What's up now?" cried Yuba, and then he moved his hand toward the Denverite. "You know your old passenger, Chickadee?"

"Yes, and I'm here to see him," answered the boy, coming forward.

"Ah! captain, I will trouble you for the picture which was taken from Finette a little while ago!"

Ringbolt lost color and started back.

"What picture?" he cried, affecting ignorance.

"The likeness of 'Redfield' which was found in Babette's chest, and afterward stolen by the Chinaman!" returned the boy, with decision.

"By Jupiter! do you mean to link me to a yellow thief?" demanded the Denverite.

"I mean to say that the picture passed from the thief's possession into yours!" was the retort. "Let me have the portrait—"

"I'll crush you first!" was the interruption, and Captain Ringbolt advanced with clinched hands.

"Your quartz mill isn't big enough for that!" laughed Chickadee, and the next moment he stepped into the middle of the room and coolly leveled a revolver at the Denver sport.

"Shall I have the picture?" he asked.

CHAPTER VI.

A REVELATION.

YUBA MONTE started toward the boy whip with a cry.

"You don't want to play road-agent with my guests!" he exclaimed, throwing up his hands. "Captain Ringbolt has to be treated like a gentleman—"

"He will be when he acts like one!" interrupted Chickadee.

"I'm merely asking you, Mister Sport, for Finette's property," he went on. "I know that the Chinese thief who robbed her turned the property over to you. A denial won't help matters, captain. Hand it over, I say! Or something will happen!"

The enraged agent of the Great Gold Union well realized that the boy had the upper hand, and also knew the danger of further delay in acceding to the demand, so he brought forth the picture, while in his eyes was the gleam of bitter hatred.

"Take it, you young robber!" he hissed, throwing the packet spitefully at Chickadee. "To-morrow it may belong to Captain Ringbolt."

Chickadee deftly caught the prize and smiled defiantly in the sport's face.

"By Jove! I didn't know they robbed people right in your hotel," continued Ringbolt, turning upon the landlord. "If this is the style in Red Flash, I'll hunt another town."

"I would if I was in your place, captain," suggested Chickadee, still holding his revolver. "Red Flash can spare a man who holds other people's property. But, good-night to you, captain. Sweet dreams to you!" And the daring boy bowed himself out of the room, and proceeded to his own cabin, at once.

"I am going to examine my booty!" he decided as he dropped into a chair at the table on which burned his lamp. "Finette merely said that she had been robbed of a picture by a Chinaman, and I caught the fellow as he was leaving Red Flash and made him confess that he gave the prize to Captain Ringbolt. The Celestial was the one who came with him from Dolores. The pair appeared to be strangers, but several times I heard them exchange familiar sentences in the stage. Ah! Captain Ringbolt! there is one person in Red Flash who believes that you are more than an agent of the Great Denver Gold Union!"

For the next few minutes Chickadee studied the portrait intently.

"I believe I will dissect it!" he suddenly exclaimed. "The mountain artist has put it up after the usual manner. Ah! there seems to be some paper between the plate and its back!"

During the next minute Chickadee's fingers worked rapidly and he was rewarded by finding a piece of paper nicely folded, as if some hand had deposited it there for safe-keeping.

Unfolding this paper, his eyes caught sight of writing, which he read in silence.

It was evident from the expression that brightened the boy's face that the discovery was of importance, and when he reached the end of the manuscript he read the following:

"TO THE WORLD!"

"This picture represents 'Redfield,' one of the coolest villains on the face of the globe. His record is that he was born in San Francisco when it was little more than a camp; he grew up among the roughs and toughs of the mines, where he graduated in infamy. He has had forty names, but 'Redfield' is the one his mother gave him, and to it he sometimes returns. He carries on his left shoulder a tattoo-mark, which united him to a secret order of scoundrels in Northern California. He was their chief for three years; they plundered gold-camps, robbed miners, and, it is believed, even murdered. The Brotherhood of the Mystic Mark was broken up some years ago, and the members scattered. But the oaths they took bound them together for life, and 'Redfield' finds one every now and then.

"This man is my eternal foe, and, while I have some courage, he is the only person I fear. This is the only picture of him I have ever seen. He never dreams that it is in my possession. I would be hunted down for it; he would not hesitate to kill to get it back, for there are people who want to get even with the old chief of the Mystic Clan.

"I have reasons for believing that the owners of the fatal mine who have died before me felt the danger of a member of that organization. I have seen the trail of one of its men in Red Flash City, but as yet 'Redfield' has not appeared. He will come some day. If you find this, Finette, beware of the man!

"In the end, I call the curses of Heaven down upon this man 'Redfield.' He knows fifty disguises. He knows the old members of the Mystic Mark wherever he sees them. I believe he has come to Red Flash before this. I see his hand in the deadly guardianship of Old Fatality Mine. Let the man who comes after me beware! He will be the sixth and the last. BABETTE."

The reader may imagine Chickadee's thoughts when he reached the end of this startling paper. For several moments he did not seem to breathe at all.

"This is a fortune-sent clew!" he exclaimed. "I am now on the trail, and the hand that stretched Babette dead before his cabin shall feel the operations of vengeance! I need not tell Finette all this. I will not show the paper to Single Sight. He is not the cool head I want. So 'Redfield' carries a mark on his shoulder, eh? Now, who is his friend in Red Flash? Whom did he pick up for one of the Brotherhood here? Babette died before he and his Chinaman came. It was impossible for their hands to have done the deed! I must play my hand well from this hour. Babette has put me on my guard. I believe he has given me a clew. Promulgate your big gold scheme, Captain Ringbolt. I know you now as 'Redfield,' once chief of the Mystic Mark!"

Chickadee hid the important paper with the daguerrotype on his person, but not a moment too soon, for a light rap fell against his door, and he opened it to find himself face to face with Rico Rob.

The boy whip could not suppress a start at sight of the giant sport.

"I was hyer awhile ago an' you warn't in," remarked Rico. "Can you go down to Dolores to-morrow?"

"To-morrow?" I just came up to-day."

"Yes, but I want to go down all the same."

Rico was captain of the Gold Guard which always went to Dolores when a large amount of dust was taken down, and sometimes he went alone to transact business for the mines.

"If you must go I can serve you," assented the young stage-driver.

"Then we go," was the reply. "Have the horses ready by sun-up," and he departed as quietly as he had come.

"This is sudden—it is strange!" concluded Chickadee. "He saw me awhile ago, but never said that he must go down to Dolores. Is it possible that—" the boy broke his own sentence as if a startling thought had struck him. "Well, I will watch you, Rico Rob. You need not know that the boy who handles the lines to-morrow will use his eyes on you at the same time!"

There was a sparkle in Rico's eyes when he walked from the cabin, and went straight to the Beelzebub.

"Whar's Captain Ringbolt, your guest?" he asked of Yuba behind the bar.

"In his room; but, hold on!" cried the mountain landlord, as the big confederate started toward the stairs. "Do you know that the young rat who drives the stage has played road-agent hyer ter-night."

"On whom?"

"On my guest from Denver."

Rob waited to hear no more, but ran up the narrow steps that led to Captain Ringbolt's chamber and burst into the room with a sharp "Hello!"

But, he stopped as if he had come suddenly to the edge of a precipice, and stared at an object at his feet.

"Great God! it is ther chief!" exclaimed Rob.

The captain was lying on his face with his arms outstretched. The lamp was burning on the table.

Rico Rob seized the body and turned it over.

It was, indeed, the body of Captain Ringbolt, and the face was almost black.

Near by lay his valise, open and robbed!

CHAPTER VII.

BETRAYED BY A RING.

THE finding of Captain Ringbolt insensible, if not dead, seemed to paralyze the giant of Red Flash City.

Instinctively he looked up and out of the window above the sloping roof of the hotel porch.

The lower sash was not shut down securely, and one of the panes was broken.

Rico knew that the man from Denver had been surprised and attacked by some one who had got the best of him.

The rifled valise—the one the captain had brought from Dolores—seemed to show the main motive of the attack; but the Red Flash sport put every thought aside in his efforts to get Ringbolt back to life.

This was a task of no small dimensions with the limited means at his command; but after awhile he succeeded, and the Denverite regained consciousness.

And the question which the big sport put, to get at a solution of the mystery, brought a flash of rage back to Captain Ringbolt's eyes.

"Well, in the first place, I was robbed!" reported Ringbolt. "That young tiger who drives the stage played robber in this very house; he took something valuable from me."

"From the valise there?" asked Rico Rob, glancing at the empty bag on the floor.

"No! the second Satan did that!" growled the captain. "The boy robbed me of a picture of 'Redfield,' the one the Camp Folly artist took the winter we disbanded as a brotherhood. The picture fell into Babette's hands; it passed from there into Finette's possession. I went down to get it, but failed, then I sent Ah Sin, who succeeded. Well, sir, the boy you call Chickadee made me deliver it up at the muzzle of his dropper!"

Rob was amazed.

"I told you the youngster had backbone!" he remarked. "But, who came after the boy left—who left you on the floor choked black?"

"I don't know," was the answer. "When I came up here after the young robber-devil went off with his prize, I was pounced upon by some person already in the room—a man with a black mask that covered the whole of his face. Jehu! he had fingers like an eagle's claws, and I b'lieve but one eye, for that was all I saw blazing in his head. His mission was robbery, too, for look there!" and Ringbolt pointed to the valise.

"Did he take everything?" asked Rico Rob.

"I don't think he found what he wanted," and for the first time during the interview the man from Denver smiled. "Of course I fought like a tiger as far as I was able; but with eagle-claw hands to help him, he got the black call on me. Did Yuba Monte, the proprietor of this devil's den, say anything about his departure?"

"No."

"Ah! look there!" cried Ringbolt, leaning toward the window. "There was no glass broken when he came. He went out by the roof. It is no drop from the porch to the ground. Of course Yuba Monte did not see him if he went that way. Don't you see how it is? The boy and the man work together. One robs with a leveled revolver; the other dons a mask and chokes!"

Ringbolt picked up the valise at this moment, and thrust his hand into its depths.

"Let's make an inventory of what he left," he exclaimed, looking up at Rico Rob, and he began to bring various things to light.

"Hello! what is this?—a ring, by Jupiter!" and Ringbolt was holding a man's ring between

thumb and finger; a gold ring it was, with a polished nugget for a crest.

"Great heavens! did you fish that from your valise?" cried Rico Rob.

"I found it nowhere else! It never belonged to me. The devil in the mask left it behind to let me get even with him!"

Rico was staring at the ring.

"This man was a fool!" he exclaimed.

"What man?"

"Why, the man who left the ring. Had but one eye you say?"

"I saw but one, but then his hand was at my throat you know. Do you know him?"

"Well, if I don't, he doesn't know himself."

"Who is he?"

"We call him Single Sight for there can't be another ring like this in the country. But, leave him to me. You don't want to see him. And now to business: The young proprietor takes me down to Dolores to-morrow."

"Ho! to-morrow! You've made the arrangements, eh?"

"I have."

"Then I came to Red Flash in good time to close the business up."

"It would have been closed if you had not come," answered the other. "Now nothing about this night attack. You must be the agent of the Great Denver Gold Union until we get further along in the game."

"I comprehend; so work the cards as you see best."

Rico Rob now returned to the bar-room where Yuba Monte was still alone.

"You don't want to give the Beelzebub a bad reputation by circulating Chickadee's attack on your guest," began the giant.

"I was thinking about that."

"Keep it to yourself," continued Rob. "The boy will say nothing. The packet which he took from Captain Ringbolt is of no consequence."

"Chickadee was entirely too fresh."

"Yes," grinned the big tough, and then he added: "Remember! You lose the most profitable guest you ever had if you spread the doings of this night."

"Mum's the word for a thousand!" averred Yuba Monte, and Rico Rob walked from the Beelzebub.

"So a new man takes a hand," he ejaculated when he found himself in the starlight. "My one-eyed friend, Single Sight, tosses an unexpected card upon the board. It means something, and it means, too, that he shall not play another hand. I'll just drop in upon him and send an expressive look into his one optic."

The giant of Red Flash City was soon at the door of a cabin not unlike the many by which it was surrounded.

A light dimly burning on the interior but half revealed the scanty furniture; but it showed Rico Rob the figure that reclined on the cot against one of the walls.

"I won't bandy words with him!" mentally ejaculated the giant as he caught the wooden latch and opened the door.

The next moment the man on the cot got up, and Rico stood face to face with the one-eyed man of Red Flash City.

Single Sight picked up the lamp and held it forward to see who his visitor was.

"Ho! it is you!" he exclaimed, and then he laughed. "I couldn't get Chickadee out o' the notion o' holdin' Old Fatality—"

"Let him take it!" interrupted Rob; "I am here to say that you don't want to choke people who come peaceably to Red Flash!"

The change on Single Sight's countenance was swift and wonderful. He replaced the lamp on the table.

"How do you know I did it?" he asked, now perfectly cool.

The giant smiled.

"You left your nugget-mounted ring in the valise."

"I had better have left it at home, eh?" he suggested.

"You had better have stayed at home yourself! Remember! no more of this work!" and Rob strode toward the door, but did not reach it ere the hand of the one-eyed man fell like a hammer upon the giant's shoulder.

"I have heard you—now hear me!" he cried as Rico wheeled. "The man whom I choked came here on most peculiar business. He is no more the agent of the Great Gold Union than I am his Satanic Majesty. Captain Ringbolt, as he calls himself, is the old 'Redfield' of the Brotherhood of the Mystic Mark; and I choked him because—because—"

Single Sight threw Rico Rob toward the door at his last pause, and then finished:

"I choked him because I, of all men living, had a right to drive my fingers behind his weasand! I am liable to stand on the porch of the Beelzebub to-morrow and read his pedigree to assembled Red Flash."

"If you dare!" cried the mountain giant. "Captain Ringbolt has his rights as well as other men. If you attempt to expose him, you will drop in your boots as dead as a herring! *Thar!*" and Rico Rob passed out.

"Mebbe I had better go a little slow," muttered Single Sight. "This is dangerous ground!"

CHAPTER VIII.

IN DOLORES.

THE next morning the earliest risers of the mountain "city" saw Chickadee hitching up his stage team.

It will be remembered that he had agreed to take Rico Rob to Dolores, and true to his promise, the boy was getting ready for departure.

Just as he finished the harnessing up, the giant of Red Flash made his appearance, and Chickadee, lines in hand, climbed nimbly to his seat.

"All ready!" exclaimed Rico Rob. "Off we are, boy. Let the steeds enjoy themselves this morning. They want a race with time."

The next minute the whip cracked over the heads of the leaders, and the stage rattled away.

As it passed in front of the Beelzebub Hotel, its solitary passenger threw a quick glance at a certain window above the porch.

He must have caught sight of a face there, for he smiled, nodded and waved his hand, ere the four strong horses whisked him past the building.

All the time there was a wicked gleam in Rico Rob's eyes.

He threw himself back in one corner of the vehicle and drew forth a cigar which he lit, and puffed away like a person who enjoyed the weed.

Every now and then he heard Chickadee speak to the restive horses, and the cracks of his whip would echo in the defiles through which the stage rolled with no abatement of its motion.

When nearly one-half the distance between Red Flash and Dolores had been left behind, Rico Rob left his corner and shouted to the boy whip.

"Make room for me. I'm coming up to get a sniff of fresh air."

"Come along!" the young driver sent back to the sport, and in a little while the giant was at Chickadee's side on the driver's seat.

"Don't you get tired o' this?" asked Rico Rob.

"Tired of what?" answered the boy, with a puzzled look.

"Why, tired o' drivin' over this old route. It's always Dolores to Red Flash, or Red Flash to Dolores!"

Chickadee smiled.

"It's got to be a second life to me," he replied. "Besides, Captain Rob, what else could I do?"

"A good deal if you want to quit the road. I tell you, Chickadee, you ought to be somewhere else."

"In Frisco?"

"Not exactly."

"I rather like this life, and I like Red Flash, too; but they've got to killing men there because they hold property."

This unexpected allusion to Babette's assassination made the big passenger start.

"And you have stepped into Babette's shoes!" exclaimed Rico Rob, after a moment's silence.

"Somebody had to."

"But not you," the giant sport went on. "Thar's nothing in Old Fatality Mine for anybody. It never benefited Babette; it has orphaned Finette and—"

Rico Rob stopped and looked away.

"Why don't you go on?" queried Chickadee, smiling in the giant's face.

"Well. By Jove! boy, it will send you after Babette!" was the response. "You are the sixth owner, and the document which was found in the mine says thar shall be six and then—something else!"

Chickadee cracked his whip over the heads of the horses before he replied.

He knew that Rico Rob was already on familiar terms with Captain Ringbolt, the man from Denver; he had seen them together at the hotel, and, as he drove past that way every morning, he had caught a glimpse of Ringbolt's face at the window.

He was certain, therefore, that there was a common link between the fortunes of these two men.

Since Babette's death he had not played de

tective for nothing; he had recovered the portrait which Ah Sin the Chinese thief had snatched from Finette, and the paper behind it had settled the identity of Captain Ringbolt.

Rico Rob's sudden determination to go to Dolores had mystified the stage detective; but he was beginning to get at the truth.

The giant was going to make a final effort to get him out of somebody's way.

These thoughts evolved themselves rapidly in Chickadee's mind.

"I have taken the chances," he suddenly said to Rico Rob. "I am the sixth owner of Old Fatality. Let the infamous assassin who struck Babette down try his iron-handled dagger on me!"

"You don't want to court death," ejaculated Rico Rob. "You don't want to deprive Finette of her best friend."

The boy started.

All Red Flash knew that he was the girl's best friend next to Babette, but Babette was dead, and he (Chickadee) had stepped forward and taken possession of the property which had cost the eccentric miner his life.

"Look at this matter in a sensible light!" suddenly exclaimed Rico Rob, believing that his last words had produced an impression. "The girl loves you, Chickadee. She looks to you for protection, though all Red Flash is ready to stand by her through thick and thin. If you will throw up your claims to the fatal mine and keep a tight grip on the stage lines, we'll thwart the league whose daggers guard Old Fatality."

The boy turned and looked into the speaker's face.

"Or, if you want to sell out and locate elsewhere, you kin find a buyer before sundown," continued Rico Rob.

"I prefer things as they are," remarked Chickadee. "I don't want to sell out, neither do I want to give up Old Fatality."

The giant of Red Flash bit his lips under the dark mustache that drooped over them, and his eyes sent a meaning glance through their heavy brows at the boy.

"Then you must take the consequences!" he cried. "I have tried to draw you out of the vortex but you will keep in it. I tell you that Finette's best friend is hunted by the keenest dagger in existence!"

"How do you know?"

"Ask the four men who went before Babette; ask Babette himself! I've got enough of the mountain air for a spell. I'll go down to my corner. And the next moment Rico Rob had left the seat and was helping himself down to the passenger's place again.

"He will go to the end blinded!" he grated. "I'd have given a good deal if he had kept out of Babette's shoes. I like the boy. Confound it, why can't something be done? Why didn't Captain Ringbolt keep away? And the Chinaman, too? He expects to hear of something being done before the stage goes back to Red Flash. Curse the old gang that made the California mountains its resort years ago! Well, after all, he's almost a man. I guess I'll have to do my part."

The stage was moving on with Dolores getting nearer and nearer.

Rico Rob had settled back into his corner again, and Chickadee was keeping the horses in the mountain road. At last the stage reached an eminence from which Dolores could be seen nestling in the valley.

It was still some miles away.

Rico Rob gazed upon the scene in silence, but all at once he put his hand to his bosom as if to convince himself that some hidden object was still there.

"If it wasn't for one thing, I'd leave the game!" he muttered. "Thank heaven! this is to be the last play. If that had to be another, by Jupiter, I'd tell him to make it himself!"

An hour later Chickadee was driving the four-in-hand into Dolores.

It was a warm, dusty day and the steeds were enveloped in dense clouds which almost hid them.

"Where do you want to stop, captain?" shouted the boy whip down to Rico Rob.

"In the square."

A minute afterward Chickadee's "whoa!" brought the horses to a halt, and Rico Rob sprang to the door.

"I want to go back to-morrow," he said looking up at the boy. "Bring the stage to the door of the Bodie House at six in the morning."

Chickadee nodded and let the horses walk to the stables which he patronized.

Rico Rob vanished almost instantly, but in a little while he turned up at a bar where he

cleared his throat with a draught of Dolores liquor.

The stage was let stand in the sun while the horses were sheltered, and when their wants had been attended to, Chickadee walked away.

Ten minutes later a part of the ceiling of the vehicle seemed to drop out, but it did not fall to the floor.

The opening thus made was large enough to let out the body of a good sized man, and all at once an object of this sort dropped through it.

"Shake me for dice! if I don't feel like I've been in a wine press for six months!" ejaculated the man as he fell exhausted upon one of the side seats of the stage. "I always thought a fellow could squeeze into the place where they store the gold dust they haul to Dolores; but Jericho jingo! I don't want another ride like that! I didn't hear much of importance comin' down, but something's goin' to be done! I kin see double sometimes if I have got but one optic. I must not read Captain Ringbolt's pedigree to Red Flash; oh, no! Rico Rob says I'd drop in my boots if I did that. Well, Captain Rico, we'll see what will illuminate the future."

The man who had made the trip from Red Flash City to Dolores in the false top of Chickadee's stage was our old acquaintance Single Sight; and when his limbs had recovered their old elasticity, he watched his opportunity and dropped slyly from the vehicle.

If anybody saw him Single Sight did not know it.

He had discarded his laced garments with the double row of buttons, and now wore a greenish patch over his lost eye, something which he did not do in Red Flash.

Not long afterward, the One-Eyed Sport entered a small house near the square and shut the door carefully behind him.

"Who is there?" asked a voice, for the interior of the cabin was almost dark, despite the fact that it was full day without.

Single Sight answered the inquiry by a quick stride forward, and in a moment he stood beside a man in an arm-chair.

"It is I, colonel," ejaculated the Red Flash sport.

"Ah! Single Sight!" cried the man, putting up his hand and grasping the sport's arm. "How are things at Red Flash?"

"They're bad enough. Babette is dead, 'Redfield' has come, and they are deep in the game!"

The man in the chair let slip an ejaculation of surprise, and his fingers tightened on Single Sight's arm.

"I'd give a million for my eyes, now!" he cried.

"Never mind 'em, colonel. I've got one, and that's enough," was the answer.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ONE EYE AT WORK.

THE man in the arm-chair was handsome but blind, and as Single Sight leaned over him and looked into his face, a light of fierceness lit up his single orb, and his hands closed convulsively.

"Retribution is a long time gettin' hyer, but I reckon she's about arrived," muttered the Red Flash sport.

"So Babette is dead!" said the blind man with a sigh. "And he was the fifth proprietor of Old Fatality Mine, eh, Single Sight?"

"The fifth one."

"Who has taken his place?"

"The boy, Chickadee."

The lips of the blind man were parted by a smile.

"Then the sixth man is a boy!" he laughed.

"Only in years, colonel."

"Maybe so, Single Sight. What brought you to Dolores?"

"A little business, colonel. The boy was comin' down. The boy an' Rico Rob," he added.

The blind man leaned back in his chair and said nothing for a few moments.

"Single Sight, ain't there some kind of a trap to be sprung?" he suddenly asked.

"Yes."

"When?"

"To-night, I think."

"Where?"

"In Dolores."

"And you are on the ground! A thousand thanks! Let me take your hand, old fellow," and the One-Eyed Sport put his hand where the blind man could press it fervently, which he did.

"I would like to have 'Redfield' planted before me," he went on.

"For this I have kept up my spirits in darkness all these years."

"The time will come, colonel," exclaimed Single Sight. "I'm an imp o' Tartarus, if it isn't here now!"

"Don't deceive me. You know how I have waited."

"I know it all, colonel."

"Are you sure this is the original 'Redfield'?"

"I am."

"Then let the mills of vengeance grind," sent the blind man through clinched teeth.

"Good-by, colonel," ejaculated the Red Flash sport. "I will be here again before mornin'."

"You'll find me on hand. Make no false play. I need you more than ever now."

Single Sight looked fixedly at the man for several minutes before he withdrew, and when the closing of the door announced his departure, the occupant of the chair leaned toward a stand at his right and opened a drawer.

"It may come sooner than one thinks—who knows?" he exclaimed, as he took out something and concealed it in his bosom. "When I had my faithful eyes I was Nanton Noxx, the best known man in the gold paradise of the great Northwest. Now I am blind, and, to Dolores, I am Colonel Spring, who lost his eyesight by a secret disease. What a lie! What an example of double-dealing! But the end will justify the means. I will one day, and before long, Single Sight says, stand face to face with the author of it all. I will never more see the child whose face I barely saw before she left me, but I may feel her in my arms; I may hear her voice. Single Sight says I shall. But, best of all, he says I shall make all things even! Thank fortune for that, for then I can be Nanton Noxx once more.

The presence of this man was not widely known in Dolores.

He had come quietly to the place between two days, several years prior to the opening of our story.

Single Sight had brought him from Denver, and had placed him in the little house which he seldom left.

Beyond a young girl who attended to his wants, Nanton Noxx had few friends in Dolores, certainly no confidants.

Rico Rob knew he was there, but Chickadee and the One-Eyed Sport were frequent visitors.

Night came down upon the Colorado town shortly after Single Sight left the blind man.

The One-Eyed Sport was almost as well known in Dolores as in Red Flash, but the change of dress, with the green patch over the lost eye, had rendered him unrecognizable to his acquaintances.

When he left Nanton Noxx he walked down to the public house called Bodie's Hotel.

Bodie's not only provided its guests with the comforts of the inner man, but it looked to their passions, for a large room on the upper floor was provided with gaming-tables and devices of every description.

Single Sight sauntered into the hotel like a man who had a good deal of leisure on his hands, and passed up to one of the gaming-rooms.

Beyond this apartment was a still smaller, provided with a counter and the usual fixtures of a bar.

The Red Flash sport leaned against the first wall, and found himself directly opposite the door that opened into the liquor room.

He had hardly taken this position when a figure came into the faro-room from the bar.

"Jehu! how did that son of Confucius get here?" ejaculated Single Sight, fixing his eyes upon the person before him. "He was in Red Flash last night. He came on with Captain Ringbolt, but he is here now."

The person was Ah Sin, the Celestial, the rascal who had despoiled Finette of the picture of 'Redfield,' as we have witnessed.

Dolores did not object to Chinamen so long as they behaved themselves and spent their money freely. Some of Captain Bodie's best customers were "pigtails," and this class were always welcome at the tables of his gaming-room.

Ah Sin had made a quick trip from Red Flash if he had walked, but he did not bear any evidences of having done so. He was fresh and sparkling, showing no signs of his arrest by Chickadee, who had forced him to confess that he was Captain Ringbolt's tool.

From the moment that he saw the Chinaman Single Sight kept his one eye upon him.

"The fellow isn't hyer to play," ejaculated the sport. "He is looking for somebody whom he expected to find in this room. Aha! he sees him now!"

At that moment somebody entered at the door within a few inches of the sport's elbow, and as that person passed down the room toward the Celestial, he saw Rico Rob of Red Flash.

In an instant Ah Sin's eyes got a quick flash, and told Single Sight that he had found the man for whom he had been looking.

"Two friends in the same game," murmured the One-Eyed Sport as he watched them covertly. "If the one in Red Flash war hyar, thar'd be three of a kind. Hol going to sample some more Dolores death-juice, eh?" And he walked forward, following the twain into the little bar.

As Single Sight was the last man Rico Rob looked for in Dolores, the sport was not subjected to an inspection, so he edged carelessly up to Ah Sin along the counter.

"When did you get in?" asked Rico Rob.

"While ago."

"You came alone?"

The Chinaman nodded and smiled.

"The Old Harry was to pay after you left last night."

"Whatee happened?"

"The captain got choked, nothing more," grinned the giant.

"Boy do it, eh?" asked the Celestial, as his eyes flashed.

"No; but never mind who did that job; we'll take up that choker's case a little further on in the game. The boy is here."

Ah Sin started visibly, for Rico Rob had genuinely surprised him.

"He brought me down to-day," the Red Flash giant went on. "The captain is impatient."

Ah Sin nodded and his almond eyes twinkled.

"This is no place for conference," and Rico Rob lowered his voice, but Single Sight still heard.

"Where boy now?" asked the Celestial.

"Where we can lay hands on him," was the answer. "Now, dash down your blood-stirrer and come with me. The sixth man is to be dealt with!"

Ah Sin clutched the glass on the counter and threw back his head, as he carried the liquor toward his lips.

As he did so he caught his first glimpse of Single Sight who, seeing that there was nothing more to hear, had just turned away.

Quicker of sight than the giant, the Chinaman saw something familiar in the One-Eyed Sport's outlines.

"Who that man?" he exclaimed with a look at Rico Rob.

The giant turned but saw nobody, for Single Sight had passed into the gaming-room, and was mingling with its denizens.

Ah Sin appeared to be very easily satisfied for he did not follow up his inquiry, but followed Rico Rob down the aisle flanked with tables, thence to the floor below and out into the street.

If either of the pair had looked back they would have seen a fearless sure-footed man at their heels, but why should they expect Single Sight in Dolores at that time?

There was near the stables where Chickadee kept his outfit a little hotel called the Belvidere, a plain place with a porch on two sides.

It kept no faro attachment, and was of such a quiet nature that the rougher element of Dolores had christened it the Saints' Rest.

Single Sight instantly guessed the goal of the pair when they turned toward the Belvidere.

"I told the colonel that another play o' the game was to be made to-night!" mentally ejaculated the One-Eyed Sport. "I didn't expect to see the yaller heathen here, but no difference, I'll show him a card he can't trump."

The next moment Single Sight turned to the left and bounded away like a frightened deer between the cabins and weather-boarded houses that helped to make up Dolores.

All at once he appeared on the porch of the little hotel. A moment later he opened the door and walked in.

A lamp was burning dimly in the room he invaded, and his step caused a head to rise above the level of a desk in one corner.

"Where is Chickadee o' Red Flash?" queried Single Sight.

"In his room asleep."

"Well, I am his friend and bedfellow. You can go back to your cot, Dado Dan. I can find the boy."

The One-Eyed Sport crossed the room, opened a door and went up-stairs.

Two minutes afterward he entered a small apartment whose only light was that which came in at the window from the half-moon in the sky.

A bed stood against the wall, but it was not occupied.

Where was Chickadee?

Single Sight looked at the cot for a few seconds and then shook his head; but instead of leaving the room he drew a revolver and leaned against the wall near the window.

CHAPTER X.

THE SECRET OF OLD FATALITY.

LET us go back to Red Flash, back to the man who had come to the camp as Captain Ringbolt of the Great Gold Union, a scheme which we can say here had no existence save a fiction, one in his own brain.

He awoke the morning after his severe choking by the masked assailant with the effects of it still with him.

Despite Rico Rob's advice he felt like hunting up the owner of the gold ring, but when he reflected that Rob was going to Dolores that morning, he concluded to postpone the encounter.

As we already know, he saw the stage depart with Rico Rob for its only passenger, and then with a satisfied smile at the corners of his mouth, he went down to a Red Flash breakfast which, with some of Yuba Monte's whisky, made him feel like his old self again.

Having thus treated himself, Captain Ringbolt sauntered from the Beelzebub with a cigar between his teeth.

He met a number of men who touched their hats to him, for the rumor that he was a great man with a gigantic scheme had got abroad, and Red Flash was at all times ready to rush into anything that promised to increase its wealth.

Of one of the men he met Captain Ringbolt inquired the way to the fatal mine, and the miner-tough volunteered to show him.

There was a gleam of eagerness in the captain's eyes and he plied the native with questions about the mine, about the men who had died before Babette because they had held it, about its yield and its legends.

He was told that Red Flash took but little stock in the worth of "Old Fatality," that it had been worked to death before Babette took it, and so forth.

The shaft was reached, and the man pointed Captain Ringbolt to the heavy windlass that stood over the opening, with the rope and bucket that hung below it.

"Is the shaft deep?"

"No. Thar's a ladder along the wall—see?" answered the man.

The Denverite gazed down the shaft some minutes in silence.

Attached to the ponderous frame of the derrick was Chickadee's claim as proprietor of the mine.

A smile twinkled in the captain's eyes as he read it.

"I believe I'll go down," he remarked.

"Thar's nothin' to prevent ye," was the answer. "You'll find lights on a shelf at the bottom of the shaft. Thar's no water in the mine; it's as dry as the Dolores trail."

The man from Denver thanked his guide as he moved off, and the next minute he was alone at the shaft of the fatal mine.

"I've been wanting to get back here for years!" he ejaculated. "By Jove! I am near the biggest bonanza of my life, and with a good report from Rico Rob, the whole thing will drop into my hands. I'll go down and see how it looks."

Captain Ringbolt swung himself over the edge of the shaft, caught the ladder firmly, and began to descend.

"This is better than being chased by a one-eyed demon!" he chuckled. "It is better than being robbed by a boy, too, ha! ha!"

He was not long reaching the solid ground at the bottom of the shaft.

There was a dim light there, but not enough to let him do without a better one.

He remembered the miner's words, and searched for the mine lamp until he found it.

Lighting it, he drew back from the shaft and took a piece of paper from his bosom.

"I've got to get the kang o' this bonanza before I can go ahead!" he exclaimed, as he spread the paper out on his knee and began to examine it intently.

It contained a diagram which looked like a labyrinth, it had so many dark lines, and here and there were figures and little arrows which seemed connected.

"I guess I can master this place!" Captain Ringbolt cried, getting up. "They don't take much stock in the value of Old Fatality in Red Flash. The fools! that is because they don't know anything about it."

A few moments later the man from Denver was exploring the mine with the lamp he had found at the bottom of the shaft.

Every now and then he would throw the light against the walls and inspect them for a minute, then he would push on again into some new cor-

ridor with a low ceiling, or through a chamber of considerable dimensions.

There were some evidences of gold wherever he went, but they were not strong enough to attract a good miner.

Old Fatality Mine had been opened long before the building of Red Flash, but by whom?

No man in the gold "city" pretended to know!

At last Captain Ringbolt reached a small apartment which appeared to have but one outlet, the one by which he had reached it.

"This is the key to the secret!" he ejaculated. "Babette may have stood here a thousand times, but he never discovered the truth."

The Denverite looked at his chart once more and nodded approval of his course.

The floor of the cavern was littered with pieces of rock as they had fallen from the pick. In two of the corners there were little heaps of stones.

Captain Ringbolt went to one of these.

His eyes had a wild, greedy glitter now.

He hung the lamp upon a sharp rock above his head and removed the stones with his hands.

After awhile he came to the floor of the cavern; then, with his feet, he pushed the dirt aside and brought to light an iron ring!

"The fools never found this!" he cried. "This scheme beats the Munchausen stories about the Great Denver Gold Union; it does, by Jupiter!"

Captain Ringbolt got a good grip on the rusty ring and pulled away till a door in the ground opened and revealed a dark passage.

"This is the El Dorado that has cost a dozen lives, and which will cost another before tomorrow night!" he cried. "This is wealth itself. And it is all mine, if I say so!"

He took the lamp down and made its light penetrate the opening.

It seemed quite deep, but the light could not reveal the bottom.

"I am all alone. Nobody has followed me, for Red Flash takes no stock in Old Fatality, ha, ha, ha!" laughed the sport from Denver, and then he deliberately lowered himself into the opening with the mine lamp hanging from his arm.

He dropped but did not fall far, and when he alighted he stooped and crawled through a low passage for some distance.

After a while he could stand erect again and the lamp revealed a chamber with rough walls and a hard floor. Captain Ringbolt walked to a certain corner and kicked the earth away.

Another iron ring!

This time a display of his strength did not bring to light another trap, but it produced a small box bound with iron which he lifted from the ground with some difficulty.

The lid came off with a growl and with eyes that seemed to blaze, the Denverite held the lamp over the box.

It was nearly filled with dark looking nuggets of all shapes.

"They haven't been touched since we went away," he cried. "This is the gold chamber of the biggest bonanza under ground. By Jupiter! a mine like this is worth guarding for years with the dagger. Ah! here is the document we left behind—the one that contains the names of the six original discoverers. True it is that nature had made these underground chambers, but we developed them. The Brotherhood of the Mystic Mark stumbled upon this El Dorado. Let me see the list."

As he spoke he took a tin tube from among the nuggets and drew forth a roll of paper.

In the light of the lamp he saw some writing signed by six names, all in poor chirography.

"Where are they now?" he exclaimed. "Let me see: Tiger Tom—dead! Bocmerang Bill—dead! The Shasta Parson—dead! Solid Sam—lost—probably dead. Rico Rob, living, and 'Redfield'—here!"

Captain Ringbolt called the roll to the end, then replaced the paper in the tube, shut the box and dropped it back into the opening.

"This is worth waiting and fighting for!" he ejaculated as he replaced the earth until no traces of the treasure remained. "I've got nothing to do now but to go back and spin yarns on the porch of the Beelzebub till Rico Rob comes back. Then we'll show the one-eyed robber that he can't throttle 'Redfield' and escape. After this the wind-up of the big gold game!"

Captain Ringbolt turned back and the following moment he was moving toward the main shaft.

But he had to emerge from the secret opening where he had lifted the door with the iron ring, before he could walk straight to the mouth of the mine.

"Here I am!" he cried, when he reached the trap-door, and placing his shoulders against it, he raised it with little difficulty.

The next instant a shrill cry saluted his ears, and the captain caught a glimpse of a figure in the light of a lamp.

"Great God! what is this?"

In a second he was out of the opening and his eyes, dilated with wonder and horror, saw before them the frightened face of the beauty of Red Flash—Finette!

The girl was no less astounded than the captain.

She had been looking at the door in the ground, when, lo! it opened, and the face of the Denverite came into view!

"You have tracked me!" cried Ringbolt, as he pounced upon the breathless girl like a hawk. "You have turned spy! You think I am 'Redfield' of the picture! No, my she-ferret, you don't get away!"

Finette drew back, but too late; the clutch of Captain Ringbolt was at her arm; his eyes seemed about to leap from his head.

"I know it now! You are 'Redfield'!" cried the girl.

The Denverite broke into a derisive laugh.

"I am more than 'Redfield.' I am Satan in Colorado!" he exclaimed.

Half an hour later Captain Ringbolt sat in the midst of a crowd on the porch of the Beelzebub, and his theme was the Great Denver Gold Union.

Not far away was Babette's little cabin, but it was empty, like a robbed nest!

CHAPTER XI.

A CELESTIAL IN A TRAP.

"THEY'RE a little slow, but they'll get hyer. They started for this place; I'll bet my head on it!"

Single Sight muttered these words while he waited beside the window of Chickadee's room at the Saints' Rest in Dolores.

As we know, he did not find the Boy Whip in bed, but instead of leaving the room on hunt of him, he had resolved to wait for certain parties whom he believed to be on their way thither.

The One-Eyed Sport of Red Flash was keenly on the alert.

He had seen enough of Rico Rob and Ah Sin in Dolores that night, had heard enough of their conversation to keep him at the window, revolver in hand, and ready for an emergency.

It was some time after Single Sight's arrival when there was a slight noise on the roof of the porch upon which the window looked.

The sport did not move nor look out, but a smile appeared on his sallow face.

"At last!" he mentally ejaculated. "Which one will come first?"

For some moments the sound was not repeated; then it again assailed Single Sight's ears, and a figure at the window blotted out the moonlight on the wall.

The following minute the lower sash crept up without noise, and the one eye saw the head that was thrust inside.

"The advance guard is a celestial one!" murmured the sport. "Come on into the trap, my yaller heathen; the nest is occupied, but not by the bird you're looking for."

The figure at the window continued to advance by degrees, and in a little while Ah Sin, the Chinaman, dropped to the floor of Chickadee's room.

He did not see the grinning man beside the window, for his shadow did not fall upon the wall.

"I guess Captain Rob isn't comin' up!" ejaculated Single Sight, for there was no longer any noise on the roof.

Ah Sin was entirely in the room, and his somewhat grotesque shadow fell across the couch and against the wall.

At once the Red Flash sport stepped quickly toward the Celestial; his right hand was lifted above his head, and the next second it descended like a hand of doom.

"Not a word! You've made your own trap, you miserable yaller fraud!" hissed Single Sight in Ah Sin's ears.

The Chinaman was thunderstruck, and seemed to lose all vestiges of color as he looked into the sport's face.

"What is that lying along your sleeve thar? Hold it up!" continued Single Sight.

Ah Sin hesitated.

"Hold it up, I say, or by Jupiter! I'll paint the wall with your brains!"

Slowly the Chinaman's hand came up, and something was seen to glitter in it.

"Aha! A heart hunter!" ejaculated Single

Sight, as his eyes fastened their gaze upon a long-bladed knife about whose hilt were wound the yellow fingers of the Chinese assassin. "You were lookin' for Chickadee, I presume. Well, come forward and do your work. Now or never!"

The One-Eyed Sport dragged Ah Sin toward the bed, and laughed in his face when he showed him that it was empty.

Ah Sin showed his chagrin in a disappointed look, and the Red Flash sport heard him grind his teeth.

"I'll take the knife," continued Single Sight, reaching for the dagger which the Celestial mechanically drew back, but he clutched his wrist and gave it such a wrench that Ah Sin uttered a cry of pain and let the dagger fall to the floor.

A look of discovery came from the sport's eyes when he saw the blade quivering in the spot of moonlight where it had fallen, and a moment later he forced Ah Sin back over the bed and let his hand slip to his yellow throat.

"Where did you leave Rico Rob?" asked Single Sight.

Ah Sin was inclined to be stubborn.

"If you think you can afford to play mum in this game, go ahead," the One-Eyed Sport went on. "I am somewhat famous for merciless plays when my opponents act mulish. Where is the captain?"

"Down below."

"At the porch?"

"Yes."

"You were goin' to use your dagger on Chickadee?"

Ah Sin did not reply.

"The proof of your intent was lying along your sleeve awhile ago," continued Single Sight. "I will go down and deliver your report to the captain."

The Celestial started.

"You'd rather deliver it yourself, I see," smiled the sport. "You will stay where you are. Maybe Chickadee will drop in upon you."

The Chinaman was completely in the sport's power, and within the next five minutes he was lashed to the bedpost, and gagged in an efficient manner.

Fire darted from his eyes when he saw Single Sight step back with the intention of leaving him there, but he could do no more than look.

The man from Red Flash did not withdraw until he saw that his captive was well secured.

"The web has caught the spider," grinned Single Sight, as he opened the door, and then Ah Sin was the only occupant of the room where he had expected to deprive the fatal mine of its sixth and last owner.

He did not disturb Dado Dan sleeping at his post behind the counter in the lower room, but passed on tip-toe to the porch, and disappeared.

"Now for the giant," he murmured, when he felt the wind in his face and heard the laugh of some night owls in a den near by. "Where is my friend, Rico Rob? Ah, here we are, old fellow!"

At that moment the keen one eye had seen the burly figure that leaned against one of the wooden pillars of the porch directly beneath the window which had proved a trap for Ah Sin.

The form of the Red Flash giant was big enough not to be mistaken for any other. Single sight knew it too well.

The man at the pillar heard the door open; he must have seen the figure that tripped forward.

At any rate, he saw it soon, for Single Sight halted at the edge of the porch and leaned forward with triumph in his solitary eye.

Rico Rob drew back.

"Hello! Captain Rob!" ejaculated the Red Flash sport, and then the giant saw who it was.

"You?—I thought you were in the old camp!" he cried.

"No, I'm hyer," and Single Sight jumped from the porch and covered the distance between them with a single stride. "I have just left your friend Ah Sin. He didn't find the person he war lookin' for. I happened to be in the room instead o' Chickadee."

"You?"

"Why not?"

Rico Rob threw a glance up at the window above the porch.

"Oh, he won't come down just yet, captain," smiled Single Sight, and then he laid his left hand on the giant's arm. "Let us go an' hunt Chickadee. I think I know whar to find him. Thar's another place he visits sometimes."

"I'd rather see you!" came through Rico Rob's teeth, and his look gave his words a startling emphasis.

Single Sight straightened and drew back.

"Shall it be alone?" he asked.

"Yes. This is our fight," was the answer.

"Well, I am at your service," exclaimed the one-eyed. "Whither shall we go?"

"There is an empty house within a stone's throw of the Saints' Rest."

"It will do."

Once more Rico Rob looked up at the window, and then lowered his gaze to the door by which Single Sight had left the hotel.

"Come! the sooner the better!" he exclaimed, wheeling about. "I see you have tracked me from Red Flash. You have probably killed the Chinese. Well, he was no chum of mine!"

"Redfield took some stock in him, eh?" smiled Single Sight. "Well, Redfield can have him, if he wants that kind of pards. I ought to have finished the yellow rat when I had him in my hands."

The two men were walking from the little hotel; they were watching each other like a pair of rival hawks.

Rico Rob towered a head above Single Sight, and his shoulders were broad and massive. If he possessed one-half of the desperate sport's agility, he could easily master him. But Single Sight seemed to doubt Captain Rob's ability to win the contest.

"This is the house," said the Red Flash giant, halting before a small house, and turning upon the man who had kept at his side.

"Is it empty?"

"Yes. Besides, Dolores has branded it as being haunted," and Rico Rob with a sarcastic laugh kicked the door open and waved Single Sight inside.

The interior of the house was dark, and the small amount of moonlight that entered when the door was open did not dissipate the gloom.

The two men entered at nearly the same moment, and one of Rico Rob's hands caught the door and shut it.

Single Sight stepped back till his heel touched the foot of an unseen wall.

"One eye is as good as two in here!" he ejaculated to himself. "Captain Rob hasn't the advantage of me in that respect. And then he drew the dagger he had taken from the Chinaman and waited."

He knew that a duel in the dark was not a new thing to the man who faced him somewhere between the walls of the empty house.

If stories related often at Red Flash were true, the giant had fought more than one such duel, and in every instance with success.

"By Jove! what is this fight for?" suddenly exclaimed a voice in the darkness.

"You ought to know. You proposed it," answered the One-Eyed Sport.

"Yes. It is to put an end to your trailing. What kind of a weapon do you hold?"

"I have the iron-handled dagger I found along Ah Sin's sleeve awhile ago. It would produce a sensation in Red Flash if I should drive it into the door of the Beelzebub, for a dagger just like it has killed the five proprietors of Old Fatality Mine!"

"Then, you think—"

"I think nothing. I know!" responded Single Sight.

A moment's silence followed the last word; then the voice of Captain Rob came through the darkness and his teeth:

"I have a bowie just as good," it said. "Get ready! The fight is on. The best man goes back to Red Flash!"

Single Sight stepped noiselessly to the right, and re-gripped the captured blade.

"The blind colonel's future depends on this contest!" he muttered.

CHAPTER XII.

HOT WORK.

It was Single Sight's first duel in the dark and between four walls.

There was something thrilling in the meeting; he had followed Rico Rob from Red Flash, he had already connected him with Captain Ringbolt, and since the iron-handled dagger had fallen into his hands, another thought had flashed across his mind.

For several minutes after Rico Rob's last words, the silence of the dark house was not broken.

If a light could have been flashed into the room, it would have showed the two men, standing face to face a short distance apart, the right hand of each about the hilt of a bowie, and ready for the duel.

All at once a rap sounded on the door, one, two, three times it struck.

"Didn't I tell you this house was haunted?" laughed the Red Flash giant. "This is the ghost. He always knocks before he comes in."

The last rap died away, and then the door,

which had creaked when Rico Rob opened it, opened without a sound.

A puff of night air came in, but no figure was to be seen.

Despite his coolness, Single Sight felt a shiver steal along his bones, and the mountain giant drew back and fixed his wondering eyes on the door.

Neither of the duelists spoke.

The door swinging back left the entrance clear and the One-Eyed Sport glancing out saw the stars.

Why didn't Rico Rob shut the door and declare the duel on? He could touch it by putting out his hand.

This thought was in Single Sight's brain when somebody came in.

No noise accompanied the visitor, but both men knew that they were not the only tenants of the cabin.

"It is the ghost!" mentally ejaculated the one-eyed tough as he shrunk to the wall at his back. "Great heavens! I did not expect a character of this kind to interfere in this game."

Aided by the starlight Single Sight could see a form between him and Rico Rob.

It was tall and ghostlike, but it had the shape of a woman.

"In God's name, what is this?" cried Rico Rob. "I've heard of haunted cabins, but this is the first one I ever found. It is nearer Single Sight than me. What is going to be the end of this?"

"I am the Queen of Death!" said a sepulchral voice, and two long white hands were lifted between the mountain foes.

"By Jupiter! I believe it," exclaimed the giant. "I don't fight in a den of spirits. Jehosaphat! my bones are packed in ice now. We must hunt another field, Single Sight."

Rico Rob went toward the door with his last word; he did not look whether the One-Eyed Sport was at his heels.

To get beyond the precincts of that cabin was enough for him.

A cold sweat stood on his brow when he found himself in the starlight once more. He had to clutch his bowie anew to hold it.

A smile stole over his face however when he looked around and found Single Sight at his side.

The face of the One-Eyed Sport had suddenly grown white, and his single orb had a frightened look.

"You can't stand ghosts, I see?" cried Rico Rob.

"No more than you can," was the answer.

The Red Flash giant threw a look toward the cabin.

"Let us get away from here," he ejaculated.

"There is yet another place—if you want to fight," he added looking into Single Sight's eye.

"It is all left to you," replied the sport. "You first proposed the duel."

"So I did; but who thought a spirit would come between?"

Single Sight shook his head.

"I'm going to brace up first," continued Rico Rob. "I shall step into Bodie's a moment. After that we'll try conclusions again."

The giant started off watched and followed by the One-Orbed Sport.

"The man doesn't want to fight now," muttered Single Sight. "He has another scheme in his head."

Rico Rob did not stop until the porch of Bodie's famous hotel was reached.

"Will you go in?" he suddenly asked turning upon the One-Eyed.

"No. I will wait for you here," was the response and the giant passed into the place.

He walked straight to the little room adjoining the faro hall on the second floor, but when he turned from the counter he did not go out by the same door.

On the contrary he passed below by another stairway, but by one which took him into the street but not on the side of the house occupied by Single Sight.

"There might be a mistake. I can't afford to risk it," he ejaculated. "The ghost of the haunted shanty came in in the nick of time after all. In any event, the youngster will come back to Red Flash. Then there will be no misplay. Ah Sin will not be sent ahead to show his hand. This one man is in the way. He will always be while he lives. Ah! he is still there!"

This last ejaculation was called forth by seeing the figure of Single Sight in front of the hotel as he waited for the man who had gone in to chase the ghost-fright away with a glass of liquor.

Slowly Rico Rob drew a silver-mounted six-

shooter, his eyes were still riveted upon the One-Eyed Sport.

"I guess I'll transfer my hand to Red Flash!" he said through his teeth as the revolver crept up until it covered the unsuspecting sport.

All at once the night echoes were disturbed by the sharp crack of the sport's revolver, and with it the man in front of the hotel threw up his hands and pitched forward.

Rico Rob saw him strike one of the wooden pillars of the porch with a dull thud, then, with a laugh, he turned on his heel and walked away.

Looking back over his shoulder he saw no excitement caused by the cowardly shot.

Pistol-shots were too common in Dolores to disturb any one.

"That is better than the knife in a dark cabin," exclaimed the Red Flash giant. "It is one of the best plays the captain has ever had on his side. Now let the boy miner-king come back. He will find things held by strong hands. There is no Single Sight to come between with his one demon eye!"

Rico Rob walked down the narrow street till he reached a cabin at whose door he knocked.

"Come in!" said two voices at once, and he found himself before a man and a woman playing cards at a small table.

"Ah! Captain Rob o' Red Flash!" exclaimed the man. "Make room for him, Susie—"

"No, not to night, Mondragon," interrupted the giant. "I want a horse."

"You can have anything I have," was the reply. "A horse, eh, Captain Rob?"

The man got up.

"Is it for a long ride?" he went on.

"To Red Flash."

"Then you shall have Benito," and Mondragon went out.

A few minutes later his bearded face appeared at the door.

"The horse, captain," he exclaimed. "Benito the First—the horse with the electric hoofs."

Rico Rob waved the woman good-night and joined the man in the starlight.

Mondragon was holding the lines of a dark steed with a magnificent neck and agile limbs.

In a moment the Red Flash giant was in the saddle.

"I'll come back rich enough to buy a thousand horses," he laughed leaning toward the Dolores sport.

"Not like Benito!" cried Mondragon. "His hoofs are worth two thousand a piece!"

"Oh, I'll be rich enough to give ten thousand for each of them!" and Rico Rob touched the horse with one of the spurs and went off like a rocket.

He took the nearest cut to the Red Flash trail, and found it near town.

Then away he dashed over the mountain road, not rough there for it was wide and dusty, and the horse carried him along at a gait that threatened to take him to Red Flash in a short time.

"What will the captain say?" cried Rico Rob. "He'll growl a little at first, but when I report in full, he will be anxious for the play against the boy. Ah Sin found nothing in the room over the porch. Yes, he did! he found Single Sight, and that was quite enough, I think!"

Rico Rob was galloping over the mountain trail when a man emerged from Bodie's Hotel and stopped suddenly over a figure lying at the foot of the porch.

In a moment he was stooping over the body of Single Sight, and the next minute a dozen men stood around it.

Single Sight in his flashy garments and gilt buttons was well known in Dolores, but the blood-bespattered unconscious man on the porch was not recognized.

"The man is dead!" said some one.

"Shot in his boots!" was the reply.

"He gasped then—I'll swear he did!"

"Great heavens! I know that man!" and a boy pressed forward till he stood over the Red Flash sport.

The crowd stared at the young speaker who seemed greatly interested in the man lying full length on the porch.

Dolores knew him as Chickadee, the boy whip of the Red Flash and Dolores stage line.

"I see through the whole thing," mentally murmured the boy. "They came together—Single Sight and Rico Rob. I wonder what has become of the Red Flash giant."

Within the next twenty minutes Chickadee's good luck and shrewdness had discovered one thing—that Captain Rob had gone back to Red Flash on Mondragon's horse Benito.

"That is enough!" cried the young owner of Old Fatality. "Where that man and Captain Ringbolt are, I must be!"

The sports of Dolores were surprised to see the young whip harness his sturdy team to the stage where it stood in the starlight.

As he mounted to the box and gathered up the lines, the crowd gave him a hearty cheer.

The next moment the old vehicle was on the road again.

It had one passenger.

CHAPTER XIII.

RICO ROB REPORTS.

AH SIN, the Celestial, was left bound and gagged in the little room at the Saints' Rest, to be discovered by the proprietor some time after Chickadee's departure.

The Chinaman at first refused to give any account of his adventure, but, when threatened with punishment by half a dozen of the toughs of Dolores, he admitted just enough to secure prompt banishment, so that, while the boy whip was dashing over the trail toward Red Flash, Ah Sin was conducted to the edge of the mining-town and told to make himself scarce.

He was vindictive; he wanted revenge for the treatment he had received, and when he turned his back on Dolores, it was with a threat on his lips and with flashing eyes.

In the mean time, Chickadee was urging the horses to their best over the trail that stretched between the two mountain camps.

The boy knew that Rico Rob was far ahead, mounted on the fastest horse in Dolores, and that the sure-footed animal would take him swiftly to Red Flash.

The base attempt on Single Sight's life proclaimed its author, and the boy miner had to put very few things together to feel assured that the Red Flash giant was playing a desperate game of death and gold for the man who had come from Denver to make a bold strike.

On, on went the stage!

Its one passenger was a man who occupied the forward end of the vehicle.

He wore a bandage around his head, and under the wide brim of his dark-gray sombrero.

At times he looked like a person sound asleep, but every now and then he would start and look out at the wild country through which he was being carried.

He could see the tall trees and the lofty rocks in the starlight, and whenever the stage struck a comparatively smooth streak of trail and increased its speed, a smile of satisfaction would appear at his lips.

"He didn't bargain for this!" Chickadee's passenger ejaculated more than once. "He would change his tactics a little if he knew that I am on the old trail with my face turned toward Red Flash."

"How are you down there?" suddenly rung out the voice of the boy on the box.

"All right!" laughed the passenger.

"We are making splendid time. We'll run into Red Flash before any of the boys are up."

"That's just when I want to strike it," was the response. "Captain Rob thinks he is havin' it all his own way, but wait till I throw down my trumps. Ah! it was knife and trigger to-night. A ghost broke up the duel in the cabin, and good luck spoiled his shot."

Rico Rob was far ahead of the stage that four strong horses pulled over the trail.

He had allowed Benito to slacken his gait a little, but still he was going at a good gallop toward Red Flash.

"I didn't want to finish the sixth proprietor because he was Chickadee, but I would have fared better if I had not sent Ah Sin to the play!" he muttered.

"That accursed Chinaman let Single Sight frighten him out of all his nerve. Why didn't he use the knife he carried along his sleeve? By Jupiter! I hope he's been disabled forever! The Celestial is Captain Ringbolt's choice. His first play in Red Flash failed; the boy got the better of him there; now, Single Sight beats him in Dolores. I will have no more Celestial business in this game!"

It was still dark when Rico Rob rode Benito into Red Flash.

Daylight was not far away, but no signs of it were at hand, and the mountain giant cantered slowly through the streets, stirring the damp dust which prevented his steed's hoofs from sending forth any sound.

He rode straight to the porch of Yuba Monte's famous hotel, and glanced up at Captain Ringbolt's window with a curious smile.

"Sleepin' the sleep o' the innocent!" ejaculated Rico Rob. "My dear captain, I don't like to disturb your dreamless slumbers, but I'm eager

to get rid of the information that puffs me out. Ah! here we are!"

He left the saddle and led the horse to one of the pillars of the porch, then crossed it easily and entered the house.

Captain Rob knew where to find Captain Ringbolt, for he went straight to the stair, and ascended to the room occupied by the man from Denver.

He found the door locked.

"Guarded against any more visits from Single Sight, eh?" he laughed, and then he rapped lightly until a footstep approached the door.

Rico Rob's voice was enough to open the door in a moment, and he found himself face to face with a thoroughly astonished man.

"Back already?" exclaimed Captain Ringbolt, as he stared at his visitor. "I didn't think that old stage—"

"The stage is in Dolores," interrupted Rob. "What has happened here?"

Captain Ringbolt's eyes glittered.

"I've got Red Flash interested in the Gold Union scheme," he said, with a grin. "If it wasn't for the other scheme, I believe I could bankrupt Red Flash in a few days. I've been down into 'Old Fatality.'"

"Alone, of course?"

"Alone," was the reply, though the man from Denver seemed to start at the question.

"It is all there yet, captain?"

"Yes. I found the box with the nuggets. I had to study the diagram a little, but I soon mastered it. Now, what have you done?"

Captain Ringbolt was anxious to hear Rico Rob's report. He knew what had taken the Red Flash giant to Dolores as Chickadee's passenger, and the man's prompt return told him that the business had been successful.

"Well, I did some work, but the boy still handles the lines," he began.

Captain Ringbolt uttered an exclamation of disappointment.

"What other work could you do?" he cried. "Chickadee is the sixth proprietor of the great bonanza."

"I know that."

"He is the one person between us and the prize."

"There was another person," replied Rico Rob, "and a person as dangerous as the boy. Well, I dealt with him."

Ringbolt was puzzled.

"I've kept my hands off of the man called Single Sight, though I still hold the ring he left here when he choked me," he said. "I haven't seen him all day."

"I should say not!" laughed Rico Rob. "He went down to Dolores."

"That one-eyed strangler?" ejaculated Ringbolt.

"Yes."

"On your trail, eh?"

"Certainly."

"Why didn't you show him the 'hand' that wins under all circumstances?"

"Mebbe I did, captain."

Captain Ringbolt sprang forward as he gave vent to an ejaculation of joy.

"Ah! you have done me a favor!" he exclaimed. "I feel the effects of his grip at this moment. You found him in Dolores, on your trail, of course; you turned hunter yourself and showed him a play that has avenged me!"

"I saw him throw up his hands and pitch forward like you've seen men do in your time, captain," smiled Rico Rob.

The Denverite nodded and looked at the man before him.

He knew what the words meant.

"After that," he said, "you thought best to come back to Red Flash?"

"Yes. With the one-eyed interferer out of the way, the boy will not be hard to handle. Single Sight knew that you are Redfield?"

"The knowledge did him no good!" cried Ringbolt.

"I believe that the boy knows it, too."

"And the girl, Finette," nodded the man from Denver. "But she has disappeared. I should have told you before, perhaps."

Rico Rob gave Captain Ringbolt a singular but a searching look.

"Finette gone?" he cried. "What does it mean?"

"I don't know."

"What does Red Flash think?"

"Red Flash is of one opinion, and that is that she has gone over to Wildcat City where Babette had a mine."

"Babette sold that mine a week before he died, and Finette knew of the sale," exclaimed Rico Rob.

"If the girl is missin', she has not gone to Wildcat City."

Captain Ringbolt made no reply, though there was a meanful look in his eyes.

"Well, we'll have to let her go," he said at last. "She is not between us and the bonanza. She believes I am the 'Redfield' whose picture Babette held; but that knowledge will not balk us."

"Not in her hands!" was the answer.

"In whose, then?"

"In the boy's if we let him go on which we do not intend doing!" spoke Rico Rob through his teeth. "He has been playing detective ever since Babette died. He measured certain foot tracks in the dust where the body was found; he has not been idle a moment since the tragedy."

Captain Ringbolt raised his clinched hand and struck the table at his right.

"We don't want any young lynxes after us!" he cried. "There is too much at stake. The sixth owner of 'Old Fatality' must lose his pile within forty-eight hours! He will come back to Red Flash, you say?"

"He is here now!"

Rico Rob stepped to the window and listened.

He heard a heavy vehicle pass in front of the hotel; he had heard it too often not to know what it was.

Chickadee was taking his team to the stables a short distance from the hotel, and just as Rico Rob turned to the Denver sport to confirm his own ejaculation, the stage door opened and its one passenger slipped out and darted away.

"You know the programme!" he shouted to the boy detective. "We've got to play a solid game together!"

CHAPTER XIV.

CHICKADEE'S NEW MOVE.

It was not long after these events till daylight.

Captain Ringbolt did not like the idea of Chickadee, the boy miner, coming back to Red Flash, but what he could not help he had to put up with.

As for the young proprietor of Old Fatality Mine, he unharnessed his horses with more than his usual agility, and his first visit had been to his own cabin, which had not been disturbed during his absence.

While the morning was yet fresh, he saw Ringbolt enjoying a cigar on the porch of the Beelzebub. The man from Denver looked very contented, even if he did not feel exactly at his ease.

Chickadee had come back—so had Rico Rob, and this latter fact softened the captain's disappointment.

"That man is playing as cool a game as was ever played in Colorado," ejaculated Chickadee, while he surveyed Ringbolt. "He is certainly the 'Redfield' mentioned by Babette in the document found behind the daguerrotype, but here he masquerades as the agent of the Great Denver Gold Union, which exists only in his fertile brain. We have connected Rico Rob with that schemer. I know that they were acquainted before they met one another here the other day. It is strange that Captain Ringbolt should drop into Red Flash so soon after the knife took Babette's life. Did he know the work was to be done? Ah, my old chief of the Mystic Mark! Something startling will salute you before you're many hours older if certain plans don't miscarry!"

For some time the kidded Denverite continued to enjoy his cigar in meditation, when he threw it away and retired into the hotel.

Red Flash was astir when he sought the porch again, and he was soon greeting some new acquaintances with a pleasant smile, which he knew how to manipulate to his own advantage.

Chickadee strolled down to Finette's home a short time after sighting Captain Ringbolt on the porch.

The boy whip knew nothing of the girl's disappearance; he had seen no citizen of Red Flash since his return.

A few knocks at Finette's door elicited no response, then Chickadee lifted the catch and went in.

The bright sunlight of a new day streamed in at the window, but Babette's young ward was not on hand to greet him.

There were evidences that the cabin had not been occupied for some time.

"What does this mean?" cried Chickadee as he stood in the middle of the room and took in his surroundings.

"Finette—Finette, where are you?"

Of course there was no response, and suddenly catching sight of the miner's chest Chickadee crossed the room and threw back the lid.

"This chest has been lately searched and not by Finette either!" he exclaimed. "Finette

had all these things nicely arranged when I was here last, but they have been disturbed. Ah! Captain Ringbolt, are you still after Redfield's picture?"

The young detective looked into the chest for a while, but did not remove any thing, then he closed it and got up.

"In the first place, I want to know what has become of Finette!" he ejaculated. "Her absence at this time savors of foul play. The first man I meet— Hello! Tucson Tony!"

Chickadee was at the open door of the cabin and the man whom he had saluted stopped suddenly, stared at him for a moment and then came forward.

"Finette's given you ther slip, eh?" cried the Red Flash miner with a grin. "She served us all the same trick."

"Where is she?"

"We've an idea she's gone ter Wildcat City ter look arter ther mine Babette had thar."

"The one he sold before he was killed!" exclaimed Chickadee, quickly. "When did Finette go?"

"Yesterday."

"Who saw her leave?"

"Nobody an' that's what kind o' puzzles us. Didn't she leave any word behind ther you kin find?"

"No clew at all," and the boy smiled faintly. "So Red Flash has concluded that she has gone to Wildcat?"

"Pretty much so."

"Come in here, Tony."

The miner who was dark of face, broad shouldered and considered not very industrious entered the girl's cabin—the first time for him—and dropped into the chair the boy pushed toward him.

One of Tony's occupations was to loaf about the Beelzebub, and he was called in derision Yuba Monte's Silent Partner a name to which, good-natured as he was, he did not object.

"How's the great man from Denver coming on?" asked Chickadee when Tucson Tony had taken the chair.

"Hol the man at the Beelzebub?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's a cute one," laughed Tony. "Go in' to make us all millionaires, you see!" and the Silent Partner drew one of his lower lids down and grinned.

"Has he developed his scheme?" asked the boy.

"Only enough of it ter make Red Flash itch all over," was the response. "By glory! it's the most gigantic thing on ice. Why, my dozen shares in Old Calamity may be worth as many thousands in a few weeks, and—Jupiter! I can't explain all the grandeur of that wonderful bubble! An' he talks it so glib, too. We're ter go into the Great Denver Gold Union next week, and I'll pose as a Colorado nabob from the hour of our initiation!" And Tucson Tony leaned back and inserted his thumbs into his armpits in a manner supremely ridiculous.

"Who are his dupes, Tony?" suddenly asked the boy.

"Dupes, eh?" cried the Silent Partner, affecting surprise.

"His visitors, then."

"Ah! that's better! He had one very early this morning—just a while before daylight."

"And who was he?"

"Rico Rob. I happened to be out, an' I saw Rico ride up ter ther Beelzebub on a horse that doesn't b'long hyer. He left the animal at the porch and went in ter consult with Captain Ringbolt."

"How do you know with him?"

"Because I saw two people at ther window o' ther captain's room shortly after."

Chickadee did not start.

He seemed to have expected something of this kind and Tony's information had only confirmed a guess.

"Captain Rico went to Dolores with you, didn't he?" asked the Silent Partner, suddenly turning questioner.

"Yes."

"I'd like ter know what fetched him back on a strange boss! He may be interested in Captain Ringbolt's big bonanza ter an extent that makes him quick and anxious; but I know ther time and not very long ago, either, when Captain Ringbolt swore that no man with a gold bubble should stay two hours in Red Flash."

Chickadee smiled.

"Ah! you've heard the same boast too!" ejaculated Tony.

"Forty times," laughed the boy; but his face suddenly grew serious.

"Is there one man in Red Flash who does not think that Finette has gone to Wildcat?" he asked.

"I guess not," was the answer. "Captain Ringbolt seems to take a good deal of interest in Finette. He was the first person to discover that she was not at home. He dropped in to see her."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

Chickadee thought instantly of the condition of the chest's contents, and his eyes got a new light.

"Very anxious, I see, captain," he murmured.

"Where is the Denver gold-agent now?"

"At the Beelzebub, I presume. He's made Yuba Monte's place his headquarters, an' he's to be found there at all hours."

"Has he said anything about Old Fatality, my new pro-erty?"

"He looked into it yesterday to pass away time," he says," replied Tony. "Jingle Johnny saw him crawl out o' the shaft, an' he told on ther porch last night that it might have resources in reserve. Mebbe you'd better join ther 'Union,' Chickadee. What's driving stage ter bein' a nabob? An' then think o' Babette!"

"I never forget him, Tony!" and Chickadee leaned forward and clutched the loafer's arm.

"The hand that deprived Finette of a protector will feel the stroke of vengeance before long."

"I'd like ter see you find it!" and Tucson Tony gave a derisive laugh.

"It may be nearer than you think," was the reply; "but never mind. I believe I'll look after Captain Ringbolt now," and the boy detective started on.

"Do you want ter invest?" demanded the Silent Partner.

"Yes, but not in the bubble he is blowing for your amusement. Captain Ringbolt is a bigger fraud than his gold scheme!"

"You don't want ter tell him that."

"I may," was the quiet response. "I give you a thousand thanks for your information, Tony."

"None o' which you will repeat to ther Denverite, I hope, in a way ter compromise me?"

"Certainly not."

When Chickadee left Finette's cabin with Tony, he walked toward the hotel.

While the clear day was not far advanced, the porch had a number of occupants, big fellows who loved a hard seat to a pick in the mines.

Chickadee looked in vain for Rico Rob, but not so for the man from Denver, for Ringbolt leaned back in his chair blowing rings of smoke toward the rafters, while he discussed in glowing language the gigantic scheme which had already set one half of Red Flash wild.

He did not see Chickadee until he stepped upon the porch, and the boy's sudden appearance caused a break in one of the captain's most eloquent sentences.

In an instant the eyes of man and boy met.

"Can I see you a moment, captain?" asked Chickadee, advancing until he laid his finger on the Denverite's arm.

"I am here," was the reply.

"But my business is private. I won't detain you long."

The Denver sport tilted his chair forward and got up.

"Come this way," he said. "We will go to my room."

Captain Ringbolt led Chickadee into his second-story quarters, and turned to confront his visitor only to see a sparkle in the young detective's eyes.

"I want to know where Finette is!" exclaimed Chickadee.

CHAPTER XV.

BOMBSHELLS AT THE BEELZEBUB.

"You want to know where Finette is, eh?" echoed Captain Ringbolt, appearing thunder-struck by the boy's demand. "Don't you think you've come to the wrong intelligence office?" and the Denverite chuckled as if he had said a good thing.

Chickadee was not abashed, although he now well knew that he confronted "Redfield," the old chief of the Brotherhood of the Mystic Mark.

"I know you don't keep an intelligence office," replied the boy; "but for all that, I ask you for Finette."

Ringbolt, seeing that he had not intimidated the young mine proprietor, had to show another front.

"I don't know where Finette is!" he declared.

"That is all," answered Chickadee, stepping back. "I only wanted an answer, yes or no."

He went to the door followed by Ringbolt's eyes.

"Hold on!" exclaimed the Denverite. "You think I know where the girl is."

"I have not said so," the boy calmly returned.

"Well, you don't want to!" was the threatening retort. "I am here on business, and I don't intend to be interviewed or interrupted by—by a boy!"

"All right, captain," smiled the young whip of the stage line. "You can attend to the business that is connected with your Denver gold bubble. If you find any suckers in Red Flash take them in. Good-morning!" and before the sport from Denver could detain the agile boy, he was gone.

"Why didn't Rico do his duty in Dolores?" exclaimed Ringbolt glaring through the open door at the figure of Chickadee tripping down stairs. "He intrusted it to Ah Sin and of course the Celestial Greaser failed. By Jove! I'll have to take things in hand myself. The girl, eh? How did he get it into his head that I know any thing about the angel of Red Flash? The camp says she's gone to Wildcat City, and," with a laugh, "the camp ought to know!"

Chickadee had already disappeared, and when he had calmed down, Ringbolt went below to join the loungers of the porch, whom he had left a few minutes before.

As he walked toward the crowd with a lighted cigar between his teeth, and showing no signs of his late passion, Rico stepped upon the porch, and, at a nod from him Ringbolt turned back into the bar-room.

"The devil's ter pay," announced Rob as he appeared in the doorway. "The stage fetched the one-eyed galoot back from Dolores."

The Denverite started.

"I thought—" he began.

"I thought so, too," interposed the giant; "but you know it was done in the starlight, an' them kind o' shots ain't certain. The man is hyar with a bandage about his head and vengeance in the only eye the Indians left him, years ago. We've got to resort to peremptory measures, now, captain. Ar' you ready?"

Ringbolt laid his hand on Rico Rob's arm.

"Do you mean that I must be 'Redfield' again?" he asked.

"Just that and no flinchin'."

A moment's silence followed the reply.

"Then, I'm ready!" And the man from Denver exhibited the butts of two revolvers on his person. "I can be 'Redfield' in the twinkling of an eye. I have more than one-half of Red Flash with me now. You can sway the rest. What is the programme?"

"Simply this: Single Sight is to be shot on sight. After him, the sixth owner of the fatal mine! He was here, eh?"

"He just went away. He wanted to know what had become of Finette; just as if I knew," and Captain Ringbolt laughed, sardonically.

"You told him, of course," exclaimed Rico Rob.

"I sent him off no wiser than when he came."

"We make the big bold play for the unmined millions before sundown, captain."

"Call on me at any time."

"The time is now. Come!"

And Bob led the way to the porch. Captain Ringbolt was not far behind.

"I heard a voice just now that must be silenced!" muttered the giant, as the two passed through the bar-room door. "Keep your eyes open. The single-sighted Satan can't be far away."

As the twain reached the porch, several voices sung out:

"Hyar's Cap'n Ringbolt!"

"And there is the man whose bullet plowed a furrow over my ear!" cried the one-eyed man, as his hand went up and covered Rico Rob.

The toughs of Red Flash saw the quick movement made by the giant's hand; they knew what it meant.

"Gentlemen of Red Flash, that man won't shoot till I'm through," continued Single Sight. "He wants to hear me as much as you do. Last night his bullet tumbled me against the porch o' Bodie's Hotel, in Dolores. He came hyer on Mondragon's horse, Benito. He consulted with Captain Ringbolt before daylight. The captain there will confirm it. What brought Rico Rob back to Red Flash so suddenly? Why, bless you, gentlemen, he was afraid that his share in Old Fatality needed attention."

"That's enough!" shouted Rico Rob. "A lie's a lie at all times! Stand back and let me show the one-eyed eel o' Red Flash!"

"That thar's no ghost in this camp, eh?" laughed Single Sight without stirring. "I will put an end to this, gentlemen. On the hands of the two men thar is the blood of Babette!"

The crowd started in evident astonishment.

"That slick lookin' kidded sport, who has been fillin' you with his gold scheme, is 'Redfield,' once known as the head of the Brotherhood of the Mystic Mark!" Single Sight went

on, his voice getting more volume as he proceeded. "The livin' shareholders of 'Old Fatality' stand thar in ther persons of Rico Rob an' 'Redfield' Ringbolt, the chief an' the assassin!"

Ringbolt uttered an oath and sprung forward. "I want to shoot the lie through the liar's heart!" he exclaimed. "I am Ringbolt of Denver!"

"'Redfield' of Shastal!" repeated Single Sight. "Gentlemen, if you will examine the shoulders of those men you will find the tattoo of the Mystic Brotherhood."

"Then, what are you?" roared the man from Denver.

A smile of triumph overspread the face of the One-Eyed Sport.

"Behold what I am!" he exclaimed as his hands went up to his bosom, and as he threw back his figure he tore open his shirt for all the crowd to see.

"I am one of the two living representatives of the little gold-camp which, years ago, nestled among the shades of Shastal!" he went on as the occupants of the porch stared at a mass of scars on the man's breast. "I belonged to Happy Gulch City. I am one of the sixteen men who felt the vengeance and the merciless devilry of the Brotherhood of the Mystic Mark. You came down upon us in the night, and when you went away Happy Gulch City existed only in smoking ruins. Three men out of the sixteen had a spark of life left. They crawled together and swore to bide their time if they lived. One of the three died a short time ago; he fell because he had the courage to claim Old Fatality Mine—because he was Babette! I am another of the heaven-spared trio of Happy Gulch City. The third man will be seen by-and-by."

"Whar's Baron Munchausen?" rung out the voice of Rico Rob, as he glanced over the breathless toughs on the porch. "This story discounts anything he ever told. By Jupiter! captain, this even beats your Great Denver Gold Union!" and he turned to the man from Denver with a sarcastic laugh.

The one eye of the Red Flash sport was seen to scintillate with indignation.

"Rico Rob," he cried, "may laugh down the massacre of Happy Gulch City, but there is a proof which he dare not smile at!"

At that moment the figure of a boy leaped nimbly upon the porch behind Single Sight and pushed his way to the front.

"I can produce the proof of their last crime!" he exclaimed. "Here are two iron-handled daggers. One killed Babette; the other came from Denver with Captain Ringbolt. They are exactly alike, you see, gentlemen. Now look at the sole of Rico Rob's left boot. It has thirteen iron nails in one side; the right sole has but seven! The man who wore those boots the night Babette died committed the crime. He left his marks in the dust; the footsteps have been measured and the nails counted. The Chinese assassin is not here to complete the trio. Single Sight left him last night bound to a bed-post in the Saints' Rest at Dolores."

Chickadee did not step back when he had completed his accusation, but kept his position and looked at the two men.

What would they do?

The face of Captain Ringbolt was crimson, while on Rico Rob's lips sat a sneering smile.

The crowd held back, but the excitement was intense.

"I am the sixth and last proprietor of Old Fatality Mine," suddenly cried Chickadee. "I accuse those men of murder! Let them be tried!"

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO LIONS AT BAY.

CAPTAIN RINGBOLT looked at the stern crowd which now pressed him almost to the weatherboarding, and burst into a laugh.

"I call that man 'Redfield' of the Mystic Mark!" added Single Sight, again covering the Denverite with his finger. "The person at his right, who has been Rico Rob to Red Flash, had another name when the brotherhood swooped down upon Happy Gulch City. If those men are innocent, they shall go free. I can bring from Dolores within twelve hours a man who can identify Captain Ringbolt by his voice, though he has not seen him since the destruction of our little camp among the mountains."

"Produce your witness!" cried the Denver sport. "I proclaim that this is a conspiracy to break the power of the Great Gold Union."

"The Great Gold Imposture!" corrected Single Sight; then he turned upon the crowd, to demand that the captain and his partner be tried by the laws of Red Flash.

"Not now. We protest!" exclaimed the man

from Denver. "We want to see the blind witness that man speaks of."

"Very well! He shall come," assured the One-Eyed Sport as he turned away.

"You know why he demands the colonel's presence here," remarked Single Sight to Chickadee when the two met in the boy's cabin a short time after the accusation.

"They want time—time for a *coup*," was the answer, to which the One-Eyed Sport nodded.

Captain Ringbolt and Rico Rob had already pledged the pards of Red Flash that they would be ready for trial when the missing witness came.

Ten minutes later they were in the Denverite's room in the Hotel Beelzebub.

"Two thunderbolts," remarked Ringbolt with a malicious smile.

"From a clear sky, too!" was the response; then folding his arms, he asked:

"Well, what now?"

"We have twelve hours of grace?"

"So it seems now."

"Single Sight has gone for the witness?"

"He has just departed."

"Who is the witness?"

"The blind man of Dolores."

"I never heard of him. What is his name?"

Rico Rob shook his head.

"I never troubled myself enough about him to get at his name."

"I can see that the big bonanza is at the end of our fingers," Ringbolt went on. "I see, too, that the sixth man is about to trump our best hand."

"If you give up like a girl he will do nothing else!" growled Rob. "Don't you see that our twelve hours may be twelve years?"

"How so?"

"Single Sight is likely to run across Ah Sin in Dolores. He baffled the Celestial at the little hotel; I think he even choked him. The Chinaman will pay the one-eyed rascal back!"

"That is a risk," decided Ringbolt. "We must make the best of our twelve hours. The boy stays behind. We are not prisoners here?"

"I don't understand it that way. By heavens! they dare not pen Rico Rob up in the hotel of a camp he helped to found! The boy's eyes are as sharp as a fox's. He counted the nails in my boots, and has the iron-handled dagger, too?"

"Yes, the one Single Sight took from Ah Sin."

"Red Flash is against us."

"But we have twelve hours. Remember this!"

Rob walked to the window and looked out. The morning had passed and the sun was high in the heavens. There was no stir on the streets as far as could be observed, but the sloping roof beneath the window prevented Rico Rob from seeing the occupants of the porch, and he wondered if they were discussing the events which had just taken place.

Ringbolt had thrown himself back in the cumbersome chair and was eying the man at the window.

All at once Rob wheeled upon the Denverite.

"Where is Finette?—you know!"

Ringbolt was inclined to smile.

"Come! No nonsense with me!" continued the giant.

"Finette never did me a wrong in all her life," he went on. "She couldn't help being Babette's ward. You have played a game against the girl?"

"It was for the big stake if I have!" was the captain's answer. "I caught her playing spy."

"Where?"

"In Old Fatality."

"And you—you did what?"

"I left her there!"

"Dead?"

"Great Caesar, no. She deserved death, though. Red Flash thinks she has gone to Wildcat City!" and Captain Ringbolt laughed as at a good joke, but his confederate drew back; there was no smile on his set and stern face.

"What are you going to do?" asked the man from Denver, uneasily.

"Something for the good of both of us."

"Remember we have twelve hours. Don't do anything hastily. The time will not be up before midnight."

"I forget nothing," and Rob vanished, to appear, a few moments later, in the bar-room.

He came to a halt at the scene that met his gaze. A dozen men stood and sat around in the place, something unusual for that hour of the day; and Rob knew that he was a prisoner under guard.

Choking back the passion that filled his breast, he walked toward the door, and stepped out upon the porch.

Three men with revolvers cocked, in their belts, leaned against the pillars.

"Hemmed in like a wounded wolf!" he had to admit. "A week ago I war a king among these men. To-day they are wonderin' if I will squirm in the noose. By Jupiter! there shall be no noose!—not for Rico Rob!"

The giant glanced up at the sun as if to calculate how long a time would intervene between then and night; then, without a word to the stern, statue-like guards on the porch, he walked back into the hotel.

"The boy proprietor of 'Old Fatality' holds the big hand!" he muttered.

He tramped up-stairs again, and walked into Ringbolt's presence.

"Red Flash is on guard!" he announced. "You can show your last hand as 'Redfield' whenever you wish."

The man from Denver left his chair with a fierce exclamation, and drew two polished six-shooters.

"I'll show it now!" he cried.

"Don't be a fool, captain!" warned Rico, arresting him at the door. "Wait at least till night."

The Denverite went back to his chair with a growl.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN AT THE DEATH.

It was a long day for Red Flash, long to the two men cooped up in the Beelzebub, and long to the stern-faced fellows who were on guard.

The day wore slowly away, and as night came the citizens began to look anxiously down the Dolores trail.

Single Sight had departed for Dolores after the blind witness, and had reached his destination in safety toward sundown.

The Dolores people were surprised to see the vehicle rattle into the camp with somebody, not Chickadee, on the box, and when the One-Eyed Sport asked for fresh horses, their surprise changed to amazement.

Single Sight went straight to the modest little cabin occupied by the man called Colonel Spring by the miners.

"Well, colonel, ther time has come!" exclaimed the messenger.

"Thank Heaven!" was the earnest ejaculation.

"Where is the man?"

"At Red Flash."

"And I must go there?"

"Yes, at once. I came for you."

The blind man sprung up and held out his hand.

"Lead the way, Single Sight!" he went on. "And you have corraled the prince of devils for me! Ah! I have not endured my darkness for nothing!"

In a little while the Red Flash sport was leading the blind to the stage.

Noxx walked with an agile step.

Having seen the blind witness in the vehicle, the sport entered the stables where stood the fresh horses he had bargained for.

The interior of the buildings was full of shadows, and Single Sight moved among them in his dealings with the team.

All at once something struck him from behind like a leaping bloodhound, and the next moment an arm encircled his neck.

Single Sight started back and clutched madly at the hand that tried to bury itself in his throat.

"None of this, now!" he cried. "I am goin' back ter Red Flash in spite o' the Imp and all his angels!"

And breaking his assailant's grip, he clutched the would-be assassin with the fury of a mad-dened tiger.

"What have I caught?" he cried, dragging his prize to the door. "Aha! I thought so. Tryin' ter git even for the trap I set for you at the Saints' Rest, eh?" and Single Sight held at arm's length the passion-distorted face of Ah Sin, the Celestial.

Five minutes later the sport tossed something human-shaped into the stage, and it landed at the blind man's feet.

"Thar's company for ye, colonel," laughed Saul. "He's harmless, though. Ah Sin, 'Redfield's' last assassin in a yellow skin!"

The Chinaman, securely bound, lay at the bottom of the vehicle, when it started out of Dolores behind a restive team that was destined to make marvelous time over the rough mountain road.

Single Sight knew how to handle the team, and the strong horses seemed to share his impatience. At the end of a few hours they dashed into Red Flash as fresh almost as when they left Dolores.

"Single Sight is back!" exclaimed one of two

men who occupied a small room, and his glance went swiftly to several revolvers which occupied a small table in the light of a lamp.

"I wonder if he found—"

The sentence was not finished, for the stage stopped in front of the building, and several men sprung to it from the porch below.

There was a confused hum of voices, and then the man who had spoken in the upper room said to his companion:

"The blind witness is here!"

"By Jove! I'd like to see him first!" was the reply, and the next moment a voice came up the stairs to the room:

"Gentlemen, will you come down?"

Two minutes more and the two men entered the bar-room, around the sides of which stood forty armed men.

It was the court of Red Flash.

Against the counter leaned the man Single Sight had brought from Dolores.

Near by stood the One-Eyed Sport himself, and at his elbow Chickadee, the boy detective.

Ringbolt and Rob halted in the middle of the room, and look around the court.

"Bring forward the Celestial!" said a voice, and two men appeared, with Ah Sin between them.

"Heavens!" mentally ejaculated the captain. "They have caught the yellow pard."

For the next five minutes the breathless court listened to a wild story of crime and scheming from the Chinaman's lips.

Fear of death had loosened his tongue, and he had betrayed "Redfield" and his giant pard of the old mystic brotherhood.

Then a man started from the counter and threw up his hand.

"Show me this villain of villains!" he cried.

"Stand me face to face with the robber of my eyes! I am Nanton Noxx, the Alcalde of Happy Gulch City. I am the father of Finette. I placed the girl in Babette's care when I thought I was dying, and I never let him know of my recovery, for I feared that the presence of my child would cause me to forget that I lived for vengeance."

After these startling words came the evidence against Rico Rob, the damaging testimony of the nails in his shoes, the silent speech of the two iron-handled daggers exactly alike.

All this, coupled to Ah Sin's declaration that the giant of Red Flash had killed Babette, that he same hand had deprived Old Fatality Mine of all its owners, that the Great Denver Gold Union was merely a blind to cover the big play for the final possession of the fatal mine, brought a quick and stern verdict from that stern court.

It was of course—*death*!

With the utterance of the verdict Rico attempted to draw a revolver, but a dozen watchful miners seized him.

At the same time his companion was secured and pushed toward the blind witness, who gave vent to a long pent up cry of joy as his hands touched the doomed wretch.

"At last 'Redfield'! This hour has been worth living for! The blind Alcalde of Happy Gulch has found his man!"

The next day the sun rose proudly over Red Flash.

In a little cabin a beautiful young girl looked kindly, yet pityingly, into a pair of sightless eyes, while near at hand stood the One-Eyed Sport of whose devotion all owed so much.

It was Finette whose prison had been revealed by a man who would plot no more for the big bonanza.

The scheme had failed, thanks to Single Sight the sport, and Chickadee, the boy whip of Red Flash.

The sixth owner of the fatal mine, which had been so terribly guarded by the iron-handled daggers of the brotherhood, was still in possession, and bid fair to become Chickadee the bonanza prince.

It was afterward discovered that "the ghost" which had come between Rico and Single Sight, in the cabin at Dolores, was an insane woman whose movements were mysterious, and whose history was unknown.

With the two pards ended the Great Denver Gold Union, which never had any existence excepting in the fertile brain of "Redfield" Ringbolt.

Red Flash still exists and its young nabob is Chickadee, whose pretty wife is the Finette of our mountain romance.

Saul Singley is still "on deck," and his constant charge is a blind man, on whom he lavishes his rough but noble affection. They are inseparable pards whom everybody in Red Flash delights to grasp by the hand.

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